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ONWARDS.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

“ANNE DYSAERT,” “ROSA GREY,”

&c. &c.

“To thinke without desert of gentle deed,
And noble worth to be advaunced hye;
Such prayse is shame; but honour, vertue's meed,
Doth beare the fayrest flowre in honourable seed.”

FAERIE QUEENE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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O N W A R D S.

CHAPTER I.

THE time for Honor Sky's marriage began to draw near at last. The house was completed, and even papered and painted. The garden, too, was laid out, and the gardener established in the lodge.

It all looked too new and fresh to be pretty, and there was a stiffness, to Honor's eye, in the formal beds, in the stone reservoir, and in the urns which adorned the broad walk. James, however, seemed much delighted with everything, and she was pleased, too, for his sake, and would not mar his satisfaction by giving utterance to her own feelings and tastes.

She had told the Austens, with delight, of
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James' acceding to her proposal about helping the school, and with equal delight they listened to her communication. Indeed, the relief they experienced was only equalled by their surprise.

“Carver,” said Mary to her husband, after Honor was gone, “must, after all, be a much better person than he appears. Perhaps one does not make sufficient allowance for the circumstances in which he has been placed.”

“He must be much attached to Honor, at any rate,” Frank rejoined. “Her power over him seems to be unbounded, and I have more hope of him than I had, now that I see how much she can influence him. But I cannot like the man.”

“He has been very friendly to us. I see a way now out of all our difficulties. Honor’s help for the school makes all straight. When is the inspection to be?”

“Next month.”

“How sorry I am it is not to be Mr. St. John—I used to like him so much. I should have liked so much to introduce you to him, and it would have been so nice for him to inspect Honor’s school, when he took such an interest in her as a little girl. He knew

Carver, too—I am so sorry we are not to have him."

"He is now Dean of Sudwich. But perhaps Mr. Mauleverer may be as good."

"I have no hope of there ever being another like Mr. St. John."

Frank laughed. He had never seen Mr. St. John—this Phoenix of inspectors in the eyes of Mary and Honor, whom he accused of having a prejudice against his successor, Mr. Mauleverer.

Honor's wedding was to take place in July or August. The school inspection was to be in May, and Honor was only to continue in her situation as mistress for a few weeks after that event. Frank was on the look-out for another mistress, and proposed consulting Mr. Mauleverer on the subject. James was now amply convinced that Honor had done right in not quitting her post. The fact of her having been a school-mistress, he was now quite convinced, could never have been concealed, and he found that both he and she had gained great credit by her steady adherence to her duties. The school had greatly increased, and through the children Honor

had gained considerable influence with the parents, all which circumstances James meant to turn to account.

He was rather sorry, too, that Mr. St. John was no longer inspector, as it would have gratified his vanity to display his grandeur to his former patron, who, he also hoped, would have trumpeted to the world Honor's good deeds and his own generosity. He trusted, however, to be able to make some impression on Mr. Mauleverer. As the chief supporter of the school, he had been invited to the Vicarage to luncheon, to meet that gentleman, but, unfortunately, the very day before that on which the latter was to come, he was called to London on urgent business which would detain him for several days. He was rather provoked, and Honor was considerably disappointed. She was, however, too busy making preparations to have much time to think of anything else, and conscious what advances had been made, she and Mr. Austen were both, not only desirous, but very hopeful, of a good report. The eventful day arrived, but not nearly so fine a one as that on which Mr. St. John had held his memorable inspection of Thornbury

school, the result of which had so materially influenced the destinies of Honor Sky and James Carver. It was such a day as we frequently have in May, grey, cold, and cheerless, and with a bleak east wind shrivelling and blighting the shrinking vegetation. It was the kind of day which makes the nose red and the eyes water, and fills one's whole being with a universal shiver—a very disagreeable day for travelling, and by no means a soothing one to the temper for the large part of mankind who are not above such physical influences. Mr. Mauleverer at least, inspector though he was, bowed before them. He had a considerable distance to come, and had been obliged to rise from a comfortable bed at an early hour of the morning, drink an uncomfortable and hasty cup of tea, and hurry off to the station, where he had been kept shivering on the platform for half an hour by the train being late. He had never got warm all the way, and arrived at Thornbury very cold and cross, and in a humour to be very severe and exacting. He proceeded straight to the Vicarage, where he found Mr. and Mrs. Austen awaiting his arrival.

Mary felt not a little curious to see the successor of Mr. St. John, and the first glance confirmed her in what had always been her opinion—that he could not be that gentleman's equal. He was certainly, in the outward man, at least, as unlike him as possible.

Many persons, however, might have thought the personal comparison in favour of Mr. Mauleverer. Instead of the thin, wiry, nimble figure, dark complexion, and lively eyes of her former friend, Mary now beheld a tall, portly, grave, and rather pompous-looking man, with fair complexion, light brown hair, and blue eyes, with spotless linen and burnished boots, and rather slow and formal withal. Had he not looked miserably cold and somewhat cross, he would have been decidedly a handsome man. He had an air, too, of considerable self-importance. Like Mr. St. John, he talked a good deal, but in a very different strain. He asked few or no questions about the school, the mistress, or the place; but appeared to think all information on these subjects supererogatory, appearing to fancy that his own genius must necessarily supersede the necessity of all such information.

But he talked a great deal about himself, about what he thought and what he did, what were his opinions, the places he had been at, and the people he knew. He had apparently a large circle of acquaintance among the dignified clergy, and among the Dons of both Universities, while some of the ministers and influential members of Parliament were also well known to him, and frequently consulted him on educational and other measures bearing on the moral and intellectual welfare of the nation. Mary felt rather over-awed and overwhelmed as she listened to this, and longed for her old familiar friend, Mr. St. John, instead of this magnificent gentleman, who, she was tempted at first to think, must be a much more important personage, till she recollect ed that Mr. St. John was not only acquainted with dignitaries, but was a dignitary now himself.

As soon as Mr. Mauleverer had partaken of a glass of wine, they proceeded to the school-house. Unfortunately, the east wind blew in their faces all the way thither. Mr. Mauleverer's eyes streamed with water, and his face was red and stiff with cold—circumstances

which were probably more annoying to him even than they would have been to other people, as they marred the effect of his appearance, which he was always desirous should be imposing. The school-room was very neat and clean, with a fire blazing at one end. Honor, the neatest of school-mistresses, in a grey dress, with a pink ribbon round her neck, a bright face, and smooth shining hair, waited the arrival of the great functionary. The children, though by no means perfectly, were wonderfully tidy and clean, some looking eager and restless, and others, of course, stupid and indifferent.

The party from the Vicarage entered. Honor and her pupil-teacher came forward. There was a little buzz all round. Mr. Mauleverer drew himself up to the full height of his commanding stature, and looking round, through the drops which still continued to obscure his eyes, said, with awful majesty :—

“ Children ! why don’t you rise ? I must inform you I come here with the authority of the Queen and the Archbishop of Canterbury.”

All the children rose in affright, and stared at Mr. Mauleverer with wide eyes and open

mouths. Honor Sky looked unfeignedly surprised, and Frank Austen felt on the verge of laughter. He bit his lip, but, in spite of himself, his eye twinkled with mirth. Mr. Mauleverer caught a glimpse of it. Like many vain and pompous persons, he was sensitive to ridicule, and though he only suspected it in the present case, he conceived a grudge at Frank Austen, and a spite at Thornbury, which, it was probable, might influence his opinion of the school. Still, Mr. Mauleverer was by no means either an unprincipled or an incompetent man, only rather weak-minded and apt to see things through the medium of his own humour, which in its turn was much influenced by his bodily comforts and his self-admiration.

The business of inspection now commenced; but the children having been frightened in the first place, made them nervous and diffident. Then Mr. Mauleverer made no inquiry, either from Mr. Austen or Honor, with regard to the extent or nature of their requirements, but proceeded at once to question them after his own alarming fashion, throwing their mistress and her opinion quite into the background.

His main object seemed to Frank to be to display himself, and he appeared anxious to find out what the pupils did not know, rather than what they did. At last most of them became so bewildered and frightened, that they answered at random, or replied only by a stare of stupefaction. Poor Honor, as well as her pupils, felt very much mortified and vexed, for, to tell the truth, they had all expected a very different result.

Frank, too, was seriously annoyed, after all the labour and expense he had bestowed upon the school, and Mary was so vexed, for all their sakes, she could have cried.

Mr. Mauleverer accompanied them back to the Vicarage to luncheon. Altogether the day had been an unfortunate one for poor Mr. Mauleverer. Everything had gone contrary with him, and the consequence was, that he saw everything through black spectacles. He had a sort of uncomfortable demi-consciousness all the time that he was not in a good humour, that Mr. and Mrs. Austen saw it, and that he had failed in inspiring them with that sense of his importance which it was his wish to create in everybody. But they

seemed provokingly unimpressed, and the little school-mistress even, whom he had hitherto hardly deigned to notice, did not seem to have felt much awe for him. All these causes combined made him return to the school in the afternoon with an even increased disposition to be severe and discontented.

The weather, too, was not improved. The wind was even more keen and piercing, and a cold, fine rain had begun to fall. The school did not look so cheerful as in the morning, but was filled with anxious, desponding faces. Honor, even, amid all her efforts to be cheerful, looked worried and weary. To add to her annoyance, the afternoon had brought, among the one or two spectators whom interest or curiosity induced to be present, Mrs. Winthrop, looking very cold, sharp, and cross.

She had never seen Mr. Mauleverer before, but, of course, Mrs. Winthrop could not be anywhere without thrusting herself into the foreground. Settling her spectacles, and assuming a severe business-like air, she advanced towards the inspector and the Austens,

as they entered the room. Hardly deigning to notice Mary, who, she always chose to believe, looked down upon her, and resolved to show her she was as good as herself, she addressed Frank, begging he would introduce her to Mr. Mauleverer. This gentleman was at first rather annoyed and put out by the request, but as Mrs. Winthrop's manner assumed an air at once confidential and deferential, his self-love felt considerably soothed and gratified. She drew him aside into a window, and spoke in a whisper:—

“ You will pardon the liberty I take in requesting a few minutes' conversation; but the deep interest I take in poor Thornbury, as the widow of the late vicar, must be my excuse; and I am so anxious to find out from a competent person the state of the school. I have always taken so great an interest in it, and would continue to do so still; but things are not as they were in the late Mr. Winthrop's time—great jealousy is entertained, and—in short, you understand, it does not do.”

“ The more the pity, then, in my opinion,” returned Mr. Mauleverer; “ a person of experience seems to me to be much needed here.

The children are far behind in many respects, and in others the governess appears to have taught over their heads."

"Exactly my opinion, sir," Mrs. Winthrop replied, while a pleased glance lighted up her gooseberry eye. "The governess was a child in my school once, where Mr. St. John took the most unaccountable fancy to her, and he and Mrs. Austen educated her, I believe, between them. In their eyes, she could do no wrong; but she is a conceited, presuming thing, and now that she is going to be married, the school, of course, can only be a secondary consideration with her."

"Married! oh, I understand it all now then—her head, of course, running constantly on her lover. But I must go to my work now, if you will excuse me."

"Certainly. I am only too glad we have got a rational, earnest person. Mr. St. John was so eccentric," said Mrs. Winthrop, who, as was natural, never could either understand or like Mr. St. John.

Now there was nothing ever rejoiced the heart of Mr. Mauleverer more thoroughly than a compliment at the expense of Mr. St. John.

He could not but be conscious, almost everywhere that he went, that an affectionate regret was entertained by all for the person and labours of his predecessor, which was hardly compatible with the same degree of regard for himself. He could not understand it. He had been a first-class man, as well as Mr. St. John. He was a much handsomer man, he was a more highly connected man, yet the lady who had married Mr. St. John had previously rejected him, though they were the same age. Mr. St. John was Dean of Sudwich, while he was only his successor in a lower office, and as every-day experience forced upon his knowledge, not so popular in the discharge of its duties. Mrs. Winthrop's insinuated comparison was, therefore, most graciously received, and disposed him to listen favourably to everything which proceeded from the same quarter, and induced him to think, in spite of her ugliness, that the widow of the late vicar of Thornbury was a very agreeable woman—a great stretch for Mr. Mauleverer, with whom ugliness, in women more especially, was almost a sin.

He now proceeded to the afternoon examination. This consisted chiefly in inspecting

writing and needlework. In spite of his wish to find fault, it was impossible to deny that these were both above the average merit in such schools. Evidently too, neither the copy-books nor the work was got up for show, for they were the fruits of nearly the whole year's teaching, and showed, from beginning to end, a steady progress. Honor began to hope that she and the children had gained some credit at last, and as Mrs. Winthrop was there, she was glad it chanced to be for the more mechanical part of education, as that lady was continually hinting that in the school, the practical was neglected for the intellectual. Mr. Mauleverer, however, made the following speech :—

“The copies and work are fair—very fair; but other things have evidently been neglected in their favour. It is the minds of the pupils a school-mistress ought chiefly to endeavour to influence. Good reading is indispensable, and these children stumble over their words in a disgraceful manner. A well-regulated mind is the fountain of all good, and mere mechanical dexterity will never compensate for the want of it. The one ought to be done without the other being left undone. It seems to me, Sky,

that you are too young a person to have the care of a school in such a place as this. Had I not understood that you were going to leave the school, at any rate, I should have recommended Mr. Austen to endeavour to procure you a situation in some small village. As it is, I am afraid I can hardly recommend Government to grant you your Augmentation."

As the representative of English majesty and episcopacy concluded his speech, it would have been difficult to say whether Honor felt the most mortification or indignation. To tell the truth, she had expected considerable credit from the inspection. She had worked and laboured hard, with all her mind and heart, she had denied herself much, and, though it was not for the sake of praise and reward, she certainly felt bitterly to have blame where she was conscious it was so little deserved. Honor's love of approbation, too, was strong. It had been so from her childhood, and she had hitherto—at least, ever since her reconciliation with Miss Wormsley—met with so much kindness and appreciation, that Mr. Mauleverer's injustice seemed something strange as well as cruel.

As he spoke, she coloured all over, to the very roots of her hair, and her tongue clove to the roof of her mouth. All objects swam before her eyes—she essayed to speak, but in vain, for her various emotions appeared to have deprived her, for the moment, both of ideas and words. But Frank answered eagerly and warmly, with heightened colour and sparkling eye:—

“ I must confess, Mr. Mauleverer, I never in my life heard an opinion which surprised me so much. Considering the materials Miss Sky had to work upon, and the disgraceful state of ignorance and want of discipline the school was in when she took it in hand, I can only say I am astonished at the result she has produced.”

Here Mrs. Winthrop broke in, almost in a rage:—

“ Disgraceful state of ignorance and want of discipline! I am astonished, Mr. Austen—”

Mary, much terrified, and always anxious to soothe, now hastily interposed some gentle words, which acted, however, only like oil upon flames.

“I did not expect, Mr. Austen, when I entered your school, to hear my husband’s memory insulted. I know I am but a poor unprotected widow, but I should not have expected such conduct from a gentleman.”

“I meant no reflection, madam, on the late Mr. Winthrop. I am well aware of the immense difficulties he had to contend with, and of his liberality to this school in particular; and I am quite aware I should have found the same difficulties insurmountable, had it not been for the talents and devotion of Miss Sky.”

This speech had no effect in soothing the feelings of Mrs. Winthrop, while it only served to exasperate those of Mr. Mauleverer. He answered, with pompous anger:—

“Of course, sir, you must have many opportunities of judging of Miss Sky which I cannot have, and perhaps you will forgive me for saying there may be a little partiality on your part, while, of course, I, having never seen Miss Sky before, or even heard of her, can have no prejudice either way, and, as a matter of conscience, I am bound, of course, to report to their lordships the result of my

own judgment rather than of yours. As I said before, I cannot conscientiously affirm that I think Sky deserves her Augmentation. I may be mistaken," he added pompously, and with an aspect which denied his words—"even the wisest may ; but, feeling my situation a situation of immense responsibility, I must adhere to the dictates of my own judgment."

Again Frank felt on the verge of losing his temper ; but he was able so far to command himself as to answer, with composure :—

"The Augmentation, as far as its mere pecuniary value is concerned, is not, I believe, a great object with Miss Sky ; but she will, I doubt not, feel deeply the nature of the report which will prevent it being granted. I think it right to make you aware, Mr. Mauleverer, that, this year, Miss Sky has declined receiving the half of her salary, or, rather, has returned it as a gift to the school. Next year, she has promised to contribute a similar sum towards the salary of her successor. You are also, perhaps, not aware that Miss Sky had a first-class certificate ? "

At both these pieces of information, Mr. Mauleverer opened wide his eyes, Mrs.

Winthrop looked severe and incredulous, while Honor, who had recovered in a great measure her self-possession, heard them with modest dignity. Mr. Mauleverer, taking no notice of this last piece of intelligence, thus remarked on the first, after clearing his throat, to give time to recover himself and compose his speech :—

“ Very liberal and generous, indeed, and what very few school-mistresses can afford to do. I was not aware, when I made my strictures on Miss Sky, that she was merely an amateur school-mistress, as of course what I said could only apply to a regular professional one. One never expects as much from amateurs in any profession, and one is always sorry when they place themselves in comparison with regular people of business. And now I think my work is done, and I must be off, or I shall be too late for the train. But, in the first place, I must see Miss Sky’s certificate and enter my observations on it.” This being quickly done, the inspector continued—“ Mrs. Winthrop, good morning—good morning, Mrs. Austen.”

“ I will go with you to the train,” said

Frank, and they set off together. Ere they reached the station, which, as I have already said, was some little way out of the town, they passed James Carver's handsome new house. Mr. Mauleverer remarked it, and asked to whom it belonged.

“It belongs to Mr. Carver, of whom you may have heard.”

“Oh! the railway Carver—clever, rising man that is, they say.”

“Yes, he is clever and ambitious. It is he to whom our school-mistress is engaged.”

Again Mr. Mauleverer opened wide his eyes, looked again at the large, handsome house, and made no answer.

Indeed he had no time, for it was with difficulty he saved the train.

CHAPTER II.

HONOR felt thankful when the inspection was all over and the school dismissed.

She had not for many years, certainly never since her childhood, felt so weary in body and so exhausted in spirits as she did that afternoon. She had, in truth, been grievously disappointed. Where she had expected credit she had met with blame, and most unjust blame, she felt with a mixture of bitterness and indignation. Honor felt that in circumstances where many would have thought themselves excused from concerning themselves at all, she had devoted her time, her thoughts, and her substance, and what had been her reward? It had been her ambition, the heart's desire of her whole life, to be a school-mistress, that she might teach the

ignorant how to live and how to die—for this, till now, she had chiefly lived, and though her success had not equalled her hopes, she had never fancied that, compared with others, she had failed at all.

It was now late in the afternoon. The day, instead of improving, had become more and more disagreeable, and its length, instead of lessening, only seemed to increase its gloom.

The sun would not set yet for an hour or two, but as it had been concealed all day by impenetrable folds of cloud, it only seemed to add, by disclosing them, to the general sadness and gloom of Nature. The heavens became more and more heavy and leaden, and the clouds came lower and lower, till they touched the earth itself. One could hardly say it rained, for there seemed to be no individual drops, but the whole atmosphere was laden with moisture, chilly and dense. The young leaves hung faint and nipped, and the spring flowers drooped their tender heads, withered and crushed in their early bloom. The aspect was raw, dirty and depressing.

Honor looked round the vacant school-room—that room which had so often seemed to

her a busy little kingdom, but which appeared now so blank and cheerless. "All is vanity," her soul whispered, and sitting down on one of the empty benches, she wept heartily. It did not console her even to think of James Carver and her future home, and the new life on which she was about to enter. On the contrary, it rather depressed her. She was mortified that she should go to him unsuccessful in her present life. She should have liked so to show him that the sacrifice he had made to her wishes had not issued in a failure.

And yet, had it been a failure? Had she had no reward? As Honor at last asked herself these questions, she blushed at her own weakness and despondency. Mr. Mauleverer's opinion could not alter the fact. Last night she did not think she had failed. She had long felt that she was rewarded; surely it was not for the praise of man she had toiled. And then she knelt down and asked forgiveness for her vanity and pride, and humbled herself beneath the blow she had received. She arose, comforted and strengthened, and more resolved than ever to go Onwards.

Honor Sky's was one of those rare minds,

strong in living faith and humble self-dependence, which, however much they may prize approbation, can labour on without such encouragement. But there are not many such. The wrongs which ennable and purify the strong often embitter and crush the weak.

The little school-mistress felt much happier. She had seized the right idea, and she clung to it amid the weariness of body and depression of spirits, which still she could not do otherwise than feel, but to which she no longer yielded herself an unresisting victim. She was gathering together the books and piling the slates, and striving to make herself active and cheerful as usual, when she heard hurried footsteps approaching the house-door, and looking through the mist and the rain, she beheld, to her surprise, James Carver, whom she believed to be still in London. Never had she felt more delighted to see him. She bounded to the door, and, opening it, was instantly clasped in his arms. He seemed equally happy to be with her, and was altogether in a state of joyful excitement.

“So your inspection is over, I suppose,” he said; and then, without appearing to take

the slightest interest in what, at the moment, almost filled Honor's bursting heart, he went on: "I am so glad it is, for I have an immense deal to tell you."

"And so have I to tell you. The inspection—"

"Oh, never mind that, dearest. What does the inspection signify?"

"A great deal to me, dearest James; more than it ought, I daresay, and I have been so vexed."

"Vexed—I am sorry for that, but I shall soon cheer you up. What has vexed you? I expected to find you quite proud and pleased with all the praise you have got."

"Praise," cried poor Honor, and as she recalled her mortification, in spite of herself, her tears again began to flow.

"What is this?" he cried; "what is the matter? who has vexed you so? and what is it? Nothing, I'll be bound, for those are the things you always care most about. Tell me, my darling, and I will put it all to rights."

Never had James seemed so kind or so fond before, and perhaps never had he felt so. He was in an especial good humour; he really

loved Honor as he could love, and there was no one else in the world whom he could love as he loved her. All that was better in his character was associated with her. They were now in the school-room, and, seated on a bench together, Honor gave him a history of the day. He listened with indignation, and burst out when she had finished :—

“ Insolent fellow ! I wish I had been here. The idea of addressing such language to you ! I wonder if he knew who you were.”

“ Who I was, dear ? of course he knew I was the school-mistress.”

“ Yes, but I mean, did he know the position you will soon occupy—that you are not a mere common school-mistress ? ”

“ I don’t know, but I cannot see what difference that ought to have made ; surely it was his duty to be just to everybody, and more especially to a poor girl whose everything might depend on his opinion.”

James only assented by a kind of “ hum ” to this proposition, the force of which he could not altogether deny, adding more briskly :

“ I don’t say you are wrong, yet the world—everybody always does make a difference. Of

course, he did not know, and I should like to see his discomfiture when he finds out. As if you were not as good as he! I cannot think enough of the fellow's presumption. But never mind, you will soon be able to set your foot upon the necks of all such people."

"I don't want to set my foot upon anybody's neck," said Honor, laughing at what she imagined the warmth of James' indignation on her account, and feeling flattered as well as amused by it.

"Don't you?" he answered, with a vehemence which surprised her, "but I do though. I have wanted it all my life, and the time has come at last. Honor, if there is anything utterly insufferable, it is the insolent airs of people inferior to ourselves in everything but some ridiculous accident of birth or position. There is that woman, Winthrop; she almost drives me mad every time I see her, with her patronising manner, though to me, now, I see in her a slight disposition to cringe. If we were to flatter her, I have no doubt she would cringe to us both. But as I don't see what use she can ever be of to us, I prefer riding

my high-horse with her ; but to turn to pleasanter subjects—I have glorious news for you. Yes, Honor, we shall soon be rolling in wealth—every thing prospers with me beyond my wildest dreams.”

Honor looked in his excited face almost in affright. She observed now—what the agitation of her own spirits, and the occupation of her own mind, had hitherto prevented her remarking—that he was in a state of excitement very unusual with him, and excitement had made him talkative and communicative—also very unusual with him. As she enquired breathlessly what had happened, and completely forgetting what had a few minutes before so completely engrossed her, he, rising up and walking about the floor, plunged into a voluminous and scarcely coherent account of the affairs of the Bank he had before told her of, and the manner in which he and the other directors, for he was now a *bonâ fide* director, meant to lay out the capital, so as to render certain the realisation of splendid fortunes for themselves and great profits for the shareholders. He gave a rapid and bewildering sketch of the wharf companies, mining com-

panies, warehouses, shops, which had already been established, some of which were on account of the Bank, others on account of himself and other friends. Money, he said, was coming in like a flood.

Honor listened, utterly bewildered. She knew not what it was at first, but in all this there was something painful and ominous to her feelings. James' countenance and manner had all the excitement of a gamester's, though it was a triumphant excitement. A nameless panic struck to her heart. This money, which was employed in all these speculations—whose was it? where had it come from? Eagerly and anxiously she put to James the two questions.

“Oh,” he cried, not noticing her manner, in the agitation of his own feelings, and believing that, whatever she might affect, she must be secretly as much pleased as himself; “oh, in various ways; the greater part, of course, was our own—that of the shareholders and depositors, which is the same thing, and whose fortunes will be made by us. But sometimes it has required some management to make out the sum that was wanted, and that I am thought particularly successful in. Yes,”

he continued, the vanity of the man disclosing itself in the intoxication of success, "I have had twice or thrice sharp work with it, but I have always hit upon some expedient. I could tell you dozens of times they have been under obligations to me—dozens of stories of the way I have contrived, at the last moment, to sweep away some difficulty which has stood between us and success."

"Tell me one," said Honor, whose interest in what he said was fast becoming intense, even to agony. James, engrossed as he was with his own feelings, though he perceived her anxiety, absolutely mistook its nature. It seemed to him that what he had been in the habit of considering Honor's simplicity and indifference had given way at last. "She feels like other people, after all," he thought to himself. "Well, it is a comfort to have some one to talk to one can thoroughly trust; and who is to be trusted except the person whose interests are identical with our own? One is quite safe, too, for Honor Sky is no gossiping fool—no girl with confidants and perpetual female confidences." Such was the tenor of James' thoughts, though they

were much more rapid, and consequently without the clearness with which I have expressed them. He answered Honor almost instantly :—

“Tell you one, do you say—I will tell you the last which occurred, though, if I had time to think of them, I have better ones to tell even than that. Well, you must know, when we established the Sewer Mud Wharf Company, which will, I think, turn out the most lucrative of all our undertakings, we found ourselves nearly stumped for want of funds to finish the floating-pier. There was a regular consultation, at which nothing was decided, except that the money must be had. At last it was proposed that the affair should be intrusted to me. ‘Give Mr. Carter *carte blanche*,’ said one gentleman, ‘and he will produce the funds, I will engage for him.’ You see, Honor, the opinion they have of me. You see how I have got on. The man who said this was a gentleman born, and he is so civil to me, you can’t think.” James stopped to take breath. Honor listened in bewilderment. She had frequently regretted that James was so reserved. Now, in the flush

and triumph of the moment, he seemed to have changed his nature, and to display himself unguardedly. The revelation was not altogether satisfactory in any way. She now asked him to go on with his narrative. Still mistaking her motive, he complied :—

“ Of course, finding the estimation in which I was held, and justly, Honor, I may say, for I feel I have put them under many obligations, I was anxious to prove myself as clever as they thought me, though, to confess the truth, I was almost at my wits’ end, when, as good luck would have it, the very morning after this meeting—for I am always lucky, somehow—a gentleman, a kind of simpleton of a man with whom I have been acquainted, came to consult me about the investment of a sum of money which had just been left him. He was a gentleman by birth—a very learned man, I fancy, and had got a university degree—but it is little, in a general way, a university education will do for a man in the way of getting on. Look at Austen, even—his is but a beggarly lot. Well, this man, however, had never been ordained. He married some young woman for love, and then to maintain

them, he accepted a situation as head of a grammar-school, in some mean little provincial place, where he hoped, by means of his abilities, which at college had been thought considerable, to raise its character, and gain a comfortable income for himself. He did not, however, succeed as he hoped. Though so learned a man, he is a frightened, good-natured simpleton, and very delicate in health. The boys bullied him, he had no authority, the school fell off, instead of improving, he fell sick, ran into debt, his wife had a child every year, and they ended by falling into abject poverty, which made them glad of any, even the smallest, help. In this situation I had frequently employed the poor man in preparing and writing certain letters and papers, for he did them well and cheap, and it was a charity at the same time, so that both he and his wife had come to look upon me as a friend, and, like most other people, they had implicit reliance on my business abilities, and did nothing without consulting me. In fact, they were both as ignorant of business as new-born babies, particularly the man, who, considering what a clever man he is, is

certainly the greatest fool I ever met. You may fancy, therefore, what a matter it is for him to have a person such as I am to look after his interest, and, as it turned out, it shows it is always good policy to make friends when it costs one nothing. Well, as I was saying, in the very nick of time, this man came to me, his poor, sickly face beaming with delight, to tell me he had been left a legacy which would place him and his family above the reach of absolute want for life, and with a little adding and eking from his own labour, he thought, even in comparative comfort; but he did not know what to do with it, the world was full of sharpers, and he had come to put it in my hands, to lay it out to the best advantage I could for him. He would even have left it without a receipt —such an ignoramus he is, but this I gave him, glad to get the money, which was just what I wanted, and which showed me my good luck had not deserted me. There was no need even of making the poor creature a shareholder, as he had made over the money to me, which I considered, of course, merely as a loan, for which he was to be paid ordinary

interest ; so if the thing succeeds, which it must, my profits will be all the greater—in fact, enormous. Is not it capital ? ” he asked, exultingly.

But Honor did not answer. Her heart felt struck with dismay and pain. The poor sickly scholar and his helpless family—if anything should go wrong with the speculation, what would become of them ? and if it succeeded, he who needed it so much was, it seemed, to have no proportionate share of the profits of the enterprise in which his all was risked. His singleness of mind, his confidingness of disposition, touched Honor to the heart, and to think how James had, by his own confession, taken advantage of them was agony to her. The want of what she had been in the habit of considering honesty did not strike her more forcibly than the want of heart. Then so morally blind did he seem, that he actually exulted in, and boasted of what Honor, even in him, could hardly call by another name than villainy.

As she sat, with her heart fainting and her eyes bent down, he asked again :—

“ Did you ever hear of anything so lucky ? ”

She looked up. Something in her countenance struck him amidst all his exultation.

“What is the matter, Honor?”

“Oh, James! I am so grieved you have done this. It was very wrong, I am sure it was. When you have time to think it over, you must think so.”

“Honor, you are an absolute simpleton! Such things are done by everybody who has the wit. It is the only way to get on.”

“I don’t believe it, I cannot and will not believe it. I am sure they are wicked. Oh, James, restore this poor man his money, I implore you!”

“Impossible! I tell you, Honor, you know nothing about such matters, nor do you understand the circumstances of the case.”

“I thought you had related them to me.”

“Not all of them,” said James, who, now somewhat sobered, began to fear that, in his excitement, he had made a great mistake, and would willingly have again drawn back into his old shell of reserve.

“Then tell me those I don’t know.”

“It is impossible, dearest; circumstances make it impossible. I ought not to have told

you what I have. If you knew everything, it would all seem quite different. And, after all, how does it concern you?" he said, caressingly.

"How does it concern me, James? Oh, it concerns me deeply. It is everything to me. Why will you not explain it?"

"Because you cannot understand."

"Well, but try, and if I cannot understand it, it will not signify."

"No, but you will *misunderstand*, I mean."

The word frightened Honor, and she insisted more strongly than before. He adopted a new cue. He coaxed and fondled her, and reproached her caressingly with "woman's curiosity."

But Honor could not smile, and there was a nameless something in his manner which alarmed her—a want of ease, and his caresses appeared forced, and as if they were intended to divert her thoughts in another direction. At last, turning to him and looking him full in the face, she asked gravely and sadly:—

"Will you, dearest James, for the sake of the affection there is between us, for the sake of our past days, our childish trials, and all

the joys and sorrows we have shared with each other, explain this to me."

James's face darkened with an expression of wrath Honor had never seen in it since childhood, and which she had forgotten she had ever seen at all till now, when it seemed to recall some long-slumbering association; and he answered sternly:—

"Honor, you presume too far. Even your power has limits. Once for all, I tell you, no!"

He had said again more than he intended.

She said no more, but her heart sank as if pressed by a heavy weight. James' tone changed again. He seemed to try to speak kindly to her, and to converse on old, ordinary topics. Honor tried too, but in vain; her thoughts wandered, her spirits sank, and weary, seemingly, of his fruitless efforts, James took leave, declining her invitation to remain to tea, and saying he had indispensable business. Honor remembered, however, with a pang, that he had told her previously he had nothing more to do to-night. She did not, however, remind him of it. He embraced her, when he bade her good night, and whispered soothing words in her ear. She received them gently,

but made no response, and gave no sign in return. She felt as one who walks in a dream. She remained standing at the door when he was gone, in a painful reverie ; but suddenly recollecting that it was long past tea-time, and that tea was her Aunt Keziah's favourite meal, she hastened to the parlour to her aged relative, reproaching herself with having allowed her own interests to make her neglectful for so long of one who was wrapped up in her. She found Mrs. Keziah sitting in her arm-chair by the fire-side, in a dozing state—a condition very common with her now. The little bustle consequent on Honor's entrance roused her, and looking up, she rubbed her eyes.

“ It be you, my pet, be it ? Be the gentle-folks all gone ? and how have it all gone off ? ” she asked in a livelier tone, and apparently certain she was to hear something very much to the credit and glory of her darling niece. It went to Honor's heart to disappoint her. She answered as gently as she could :—

“ Pretty middling, auntie, dear.”

“ Pretty middling ! be that all, darling ? You be so modest, Honor ! what did the gentleman say ? ”

“He did not say much, auntie. I don’t think he was quite so well satisfied as we all expected ; but I don’t think he quite understood—” Honor stopped, for she felt that her voice was betraying the agitation and vexation of her spirits. But it was too late—her aunt perceived that she was out of sorts—a very uncommon thing with Honor.

“Never mind, darling. I am sure it warn’t your fault ; never lose heart, Honor, dear. James will be back to-morrow, and then we shall see the smile on your face again. Who has got a sweetheart like you, my pet—so rich, and handsome, and clever ? Who would ever have thought of my living to see my Honor a lady, and to think of little Jim as come with you to the almshouse that cold, dark night ! The Lord have blessed me indeed, that I should live to see it.”

As Honor bent her face down, under pretext of setting the tea-kettle on the fire, her tears dropped down on the hearth. Her aunt had chosen an unfortunate theme for consolation.

“I hope,” continued Mrs. Keziah, “as how I may be spared to see the wedding, but I am a very old woman. I has finished the two

figures of the bride and bridegroom, and now I only wants to do the clergyman. It will be my last work, I thinks, and when I am gone, Honor, it pleases me to think as how you will show it to your children, if it pleases the Lord as how you should have any, and tell them as how they war made by old Aunt Keziah."

Honor was now pouring out tea ; her aunt's words quite overcame her, and the tears ran down her cheeks. Rising, she threw her arms round the old woman, saying :—

" Oh, Auntie, nobody will ever love me better than you do, and I shall never be happier anywhere than I have been with you."

" Bless you, my child," said the old woman, fervently. " God Almighty bless you, and make you happy, as I know He will, wherever you be ! "

Honor was much affected, but her aunt's blessing did her good. She felt there was a reality in it, and that, let sorrow come as it might, she should be blessed. She now returned to the table, poured out the tea, and strove to speak cheerfully ; but without much success. Fortunately, however, conversation did not seem much wanted. Her aunt ap-

peared to be engrossed by some ideas of her own. As soon as she had finished tea, she asked Honor to bring her the box containing the bride and bridegroom. It was a great trial to Honor, but she duly admired them, more especially some improvements which had been introduced into their dress since she had last seen them. As soon as they were put by again, she proposed going to bed, as she generally did now early in the evening. It was a relief to Honor, who, gloomy as they were, longed to be alone with her own thoughts. As soon as she had seen her aunt safe in bed, and had taken away her candle, she returned to the little parlour.

It was not dark yet, for though the weather was cold the days were long; but the sun was set, and the dusk grew ever more and more gloomy. Honor sat down by the fire to endeavour to compose her mind, and think over what had passed in her conversation with James. She tried to hope that her previous depression of spirits had led her to see everything through a gloomy point of view. But the more she conned over all that had passed, the more uneasy she felt. Could she be doing James injustice? Was she right in thinking thus

hardly of one who loved her? Might it not be that she did not understand? Such things were always done, James had said; but did that make them right? Not according to Honor's code of morality. And yet might not James' refusal to explain have been merely because he was offended with her for persisting in asking what it might not be right for him to tell. Yet he had begun by telling her. He had stopped only when she disapproved, and he had certainly prevaricated. All these thoughts made her very miserable. She knew James' ambition for wealth and greatness, and she had long lamented it as the blot in his character. Lately she had lamented it less because she fancied she had seen in it a noble and philanthropic aim, and she thought it was only the reserve of his character which had prevented him from disclosing this to her more fully; now again she seemed to perceive its worse features, and she dreaded with agony it might lead him astray from that narrow path of truth and righteousness, in which it was Honor's most fervent prayer that she and her's might ever be guided. Nay, had it not already led him astray? Ac-

cording to the plain meaning of the words he had spoken, it certainly had, but in the first stupefaction of the sudden blow, Honor had hoped against hope. Without further confirmation, her heart refused to believe even his own statement. He had said he could explain it if he pleased, and she tried hard to believe he could—tried even against the plain verdict of her own understanding. Again she prayed earnestly for light, and strength, and guidance, and when she had prayed, she opened her Bible, and turning to the verse she wanted, read, “What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul.”

But what was to be done? was again the question which presented itself. James had refused to give her any further information, in terms so positive, and in a manner so firm and angry, that she felt to put the question to him again would be to break with him for ever, and this, as yet, she shrunk from. Her heart clung to him, and hoped, in spite of all. What course, then, should she pursue? But one way, seemed open to her, and that was so strange a one that she shrunk from it, casting about in her mind to think of another. But in vain, there was no

other. Then she thought she must give it up ; but the torture of the doubt she suffered seemed to be too great to be borne even for another night, and if she did not take this step, she might have to bear it all her life. For till she knew James was guilty, she could not cast him off, nor should she even then, if she could persuade him to repent, which she hardly doubted. His whole happiness, present and future, as well as her own peace of mind, seemed to hang upon her discovering for certain what she wished to know.

She hesitated no longer, did not even reflect on the strangeness of the step she was about to take. But, seizing her bonnet and shawl, she sallied forth in the deepening dusk, heedless of the bitter wind and the thick cold rain.

She felt it was her forlorn hope.

CHAPTER III.

WITH the fleetness of the roe or the antelope, or whatever other animal may best serve as a simile, Honor sped down the wet rambling streets of the old town, then darted down a lane into a back way. It was very near the place where Aunt Keziah had lived before she went to the almshouse, and where, in former days, the two little homeless children had sought her together. Even now, as she passed it, the memory of that night came back upon Honor with strange distinctness, and she seemed to remember many trifling circumstances, and to recall little traits of James' character, which she had not thought of for many a long year, and which appeared to her now as if fraught with a significance which had then escaped her. But she thrust the memory

of them aside, and strove to silence the suggestions they would whisper to her mind.

At last, she found herself in front of a shabby house, old itself, but with a new front of red brick. Here she stopped, and paused, and her heart beat violently. For a second, she hesitated to enter, and thought of turning back and running home as fast as she could. Now, for the first time, the strangeness of the step she had taken broke upon her mind. She hesitated. Was it not idle curiosity? Did she not seek to pry into what she had nothing to do with? No; she knew her own motives—she knew, in the sight of God, they were pure. She felt that she could not marry James Carver, with the terrible doubts in her mind which circumstances had forced upon her. She remembered that, the very last time she had passed this house with him, the stranger they had seen under the tree, the night they had taken shelter from the rain, had looked from the window and appointed a meeting, and, when Honor had asked what he wanted, she could obtain no other answer than, “Business!” nor would James give her any further information than he had previously done as to

who this mysterious personage was. It had often struck Honor that they never met him by daylight, though they had frequently done so in the dusk. James had evidently been annoyed at his looking from the window; and when she asked if he lived there, he had replied that he lodged there sometimes.

“Was he there now?” she wondered; “and did she do wrong in seeking him?” Again she commended herself to God, and strengthened herself with the consciousness of her own motives. She knocked at the door, and, as she did so, her heart rebounded almost as loudly.

The door was opened by a slovenly, slipshod maid-servant, with a smutty face, and carrying in her hand a guttering candle in a greasy candlestick.

“Is Mr. Wood at home?” said Honor.

The girl stared.

“I think he be, miss. Does you want him?”

“Yes.”

The girl grinned:—

“He be having his pipe and gin-and-water. P'raps he don't want to be disturbed. Who

shall I say wants him ? ” she asked, less respectfully.

“ A young person—a young woman, you may say.”

“ Yes,” said the girl, and bounced away.

She returned shortly, and bid Honor enter. Arrived at the foot of a steep, turning staircase, she told Honor to mount, and that it was the first door at the top of the stairs. Without offering to show her the way, she then made room for her to pass. As soon as she had passed the turn of the stairs, the girl disappeared with the candle, and left her to scramble the rest of the way in the dark. When Honor arrived at the top, she had to grope for the door. Had retreat been possible, she might again have thought of it ; but it was not. Nerving herself therefore with the reflection that all that remained for her now to do was to go through with what she had undertaken with courage and dignity, she tapped on the door, and was answered :—

“ Come in ! ” by a voice she recognised at once as that of the mysterious stranger with whom James was connected.

She entered, pale and agitated, but striving

to command herself. The scene which presented itself to her eyes was not calculated to reassure her. It was the same room we have already beheld tenanted by William Wood. To-night, it looked more wretched, if possible, than it had done even on that occasion. That there had been an attempt to light the fire was only witnessed by a thin column of smoke which struggled up from a little pyramid of coals in the middle of the grate. At one corner of a dusty square mahogany table, with a tumbler of gin-and-water before him, sat William Wood, smoking a pipe. He laid it down as Honor entered, and stared somewhat curiously at her. She was wrapped up in a large shawl, and wore a veil, so that, by the light of the one dim candle, he could perceive only that his visitor was a female.

“Well?” he said, as she did not speak at once.

“I have taken the liberty, sir,” she said, “though I am a stranger to you, of calling to inquire into some matters which very nearly and intimately concern the welfare and happiness of my whole life, and of that of one who—who is very dear to me.”

“Then I am afraid, my good girl, you have

come to the wrong person. I know nothing about you or yours."

And his handsome, *roué* face expressed a haughty indifference and weariness. Honor now came nearer, and, looking him in the face, raised her veil.

"Indeed, but you do, sir," she said. "You have seen me before with Mr. James Carver. I am engaged to him, and my name is Honor Sky."

Mr. Wood now looked at her with a grain more of curiosity and interest. The colour came and went in her ingenuous cheek, and her blue eyes shone with candour and earnestness. William Wood remembered her name. He had often seen her with James Carver, but he had never looked at her till now. She was quite a different kind of person from what he had imagined her to be. She was not a lady, but, with the instinct of a gentleman, Mr. Wood felt at once that she was not vulgar, and that, whatever had brought her, it was not levity. Involuntarily, his tone became more respectful, and he rose from his seat, forego ing his first intention of asking Honor to sit down.

“I have heard Mr. Carver mention your name in terms of the highest respect and regard, Miss Sky; but, if you wish any information about any affair concerning him, it would be much better to apply to himself. He is in Thornbury to-night, and, if you would return home, I will send him to you.”

“Oh, but that will not do! He will not tell me what I wish to know, and it is that makes me fear. And I must—I must know it.”

She spoke with passion, her nervousness and bashfulness for the moment were gone, and she remembered only how James' character and happiness were staked on Mr. Wood's answer.

“You say you must know,” he answered, not suspecting her motives, which were, indeed, incomprehensible to him. “But I do not even understand what it is you must know.”

Honor explained as well as she could, though her feelings made her somewhat incoherent. She related part of what had passed between James and herself, how her fears had been awakened, how she had been puzzled by the tale he told her, how it had

seemed to her selfish, dishonest, wicked, how he had said he would explain it, but had refused to do so, because he was angry with her.

“God forgive me,” she said, “if I suspect wrongfully—and God grant that I may. I will intreat his pardon humbly if I am mistaken, but it is partly his own fault. I could not rest even one night in such an uncertainty.”

“This is a very singular affair, Miss Sky, and if you will pardon me for saying so, I do not think you act fairly towards your lover. Business is a man’s affair and not a woman’s. A woman ought never for a moment to allow herself to question her husband’s conduct.”

“And if I marry,” said Honor, “I trust it will be so with me. But James Carver is not my husband, and it is that I may have this full confidence in him I now come. You say women have nothing to do with business; but surely all have to do with righteousness and truth.”

“Righteousness and truth!” Wood repeated scornfully. “Fine words these are,

and might be finer things perhaps, if they had any existence."

Honor started back in horror.

"And you are James Carver's friend," she said.

William Wood's impulse was to disclaim and despise the friendship of James Carver. He was his associate, not his friend; but he withstood the impulse.

"Don't look so shocked, Miss Sky. I speak of the world as I have found it. It has not been a kind world to me," he added, bitterly; "and as to this affair about which you have come to consult me, all I have to tell you is, I am engaged in the speculation as well as Mr. Carver, though with the details of the management I have nothing to do. I hate dirty work—the mean ungentlemanly parts of business. And though but now I speak scoffingly of what you and canting people call 'righteousness and truth,' I am a man of honour. A lie I have never told, and never will tell. I do not enquire too closely into your friend Carver's proceedings. I have no right to do it, in fact. I am not a director. All I know is he is long-headed

enough, and not likely to fail in what he undertakes. That is all I have anything to do with."

"But if you gain fortune for yourself by the wrong acts of another, have you nothing to do with that?"

"No—nothing that I can see. Their deeds are between themselves and their conscience. I have enough to do to take care of my own, and to keep my own hands clean—and clean they are, I assure you, from such things as those you tell me. I tell you I never enquire into their proceedings—if I did, it would have no effect in stopping them. And I recommend you, Miss Sky, to adopt my plan, and ignore all those things with which you have not immediately to do, and cannot possibly prevent."

"But I have to do with them, if James has to do with them."

William Wood smiled sarcastically and enquired:—

"And suppose, Miss Sky, you were to find your worst fears confirmed, would you really recommend your lover to give up such brilliant prospects and remain contented with the

situation of head-clerk in a railway, when you might roll in wealth, and be the wife, perhaps, of a member of Parliament."

"Oh yes, I would urge him to give them up in a moment." And she began to walk about in great agitation, saying over and over, as if to stay her own mind on the words, "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"

A slight shade of surprise still mingled with the cynical expression of William Wood's face as he spoke again.

"But if he refused, it would not be your fault, and your conscience would then be clear to enjoy your grandeur—" he stopped, for amazement and disgust were painted in Honor's face. "Well then," he said, "but what would you do if he refused?"

Her countenance became as pale as that of the dead, her chest heaved, and her lip quivered.

"I have but one course—give it all up if I die."

"Give up your lover—give up this great marriage—continue a poor drudging school-

mistress the rest of your days, or marry some mean mechanic? Nonsense—I shall believe this when I see it!"

Honor rose. She was still deadly pale, but her tone was simple and dignified:—

"It does not signify to me, sir, what you or anybody believes." And she let down her veil over her white face, and was gone.

William Wood remained struck with astonishment.

"She is either," he said to himself, "the most consummate actress in the world, or else she is such a woman—such a creature as I did not think existed. But any way, she is an extraordinary girl, and ought to have been born a lady. Such sentiments are above her birth. How did she ever become attached to a grovelling worm like James Carver?"

He remained for some time after she was gone, endeavouring to solve this mystery, and at last he thought he had unravelled it. "I don't believe she loves him, but she sees no other way of escape from the sordid life to which her destiny has condemned her, and to which she has too lofty and refined a soul to conform." It was the first time for many a

day that anything had had power to divert his thoughts from himself, and his own misfortunes and ambition. The conduct and sentiments of Honor Sky had struck a chord in his bosom which had long ceased to vibrate. Like a reminiscence of some previous state of existence when he was in act comparatively innocent, broke upon his mind the faint memory of certain feelings and aspirations of old, in which he used to indulge as he read some noble poem, or heroic history ; aspirations which with him had never been more than emotions, and which vanished ere they became effort, for he had never learnt that glorious lesson of self-denial—the one source of all noble endeavour. Long, long ago now, however, it was since he had ceased to be visited even by such passing emotions. A life of indulged passions, of reckless selfishness, of wrathfulness and bitterness, seemed to have swept away from his heart all that had once been gentler and purer in its instincts. From him had been taken away even that which he had. But now a gleam of memory seemed to throw a dim and momentary light once more on those long-buried thoughts. Yet he shrank from it with pain. It only re-

vealed by contrast too much the hideousness of the present.

“No,” he said to himself, “there is no reality in such things. Avaunt then, evil spirit, and torment me not with such childish recollections.”

But it was in vain ; the Demon of the Past would not be chidden away, but would bring yet other thoughts and other memories from days yet more remote and more innocent. Scenes of childhood, scenes of boyhood, mother’s love and father’s kindness, thoughts of the dead, and the distant, and the estranged, flowed in upon his soul, till he no longer resisted their full tide ; but bowing his head on his hands, this proud, sinful, wretched man wept like a child.

Were they tears unto repentance ?

Alas ! I fear not. There was no one there to bind up the broken heart, or to heal the wounded spirit, nor do I know that if there had, such would have been listened to. I only know that William Wood rose the next morning with the same thoughts, the same wishes, the same resolutions, which had supplied him with motives for a long time past, and yet there

was one difference. He remembered the strange visit he had had the preceding evening, and with some curiosity he wondered how the affair would end. "She will persuade herself somehow that it is all right to marry him. Well, as I have promised Carver to visit his wife, I am glad she is so piquante a woman."

But I must now return to Honor Sky.

Like one in some terrible dream, she made her way, without knowing how, down the dark staircase, and out into the gloomy, lampless lane, in which the house was situated. The bitter anguish of her own heart filled her whole being. The evening had become very wet. The rain fell absolutely in torrents, and the insufficiently-drained streets ran like water-courses. But Honor heeded it not. Though her feet were soaked and her garments dripping, and her curls hanging straight and dank, she hardly felt it, and the raw, keen wind did not cool her fevered frame, though it made her shiver involuntarily. There were few persons out on such a night, and those few Honor passed without being aware of their presence. She could not be said to be absorbed in her own thoughts, for she had no

thoughts. Her thoughts, her very existence, were all merged in one overwhelming feeling.

She had nearly reached home when, just under a lamp-post, she ran against some one who had suddenly turned the corner of a wall against which it was placed.

She was passing on, with a mechanical “Beg pardon,” when the person in question suddenly exclaimed, in a voice of amazement:

“Honor! no, yet surely it is Honor Sky.”

She recoiled in horror and affright, for the tones were those of James Carver.

“Let me pass,” she cried; “let me pass now. Not to-night, I say, not to-night.”

But he had taken her by the arm and drawn her under the lamp. He started as he beheld, through the dripping hair, the pale, wild features which the light disclosed.

“Good heavens!” he cried, in some degree terror-stricken himself. “What is the matter? Speak at once, I entreat, I insist.”

But she only reiterated: “Not now—not now—to-morrow.”

“At least, I will go with you to your door. Nay, I will, you shall not prevent me. Honor, are you mad? At least you must tell me.

where you have been—I have a right to know, and, by heaven, I will know."

And Honor answered :—" I have been at Mr. William Wood's."

James swore a great oath, which made Honor tremble from head to foot. He spoke furiously :—

" And how dared you go there ? and you tell me to my face. He is not a man with whom it is safe for women to associate."

Honor stopped. They were now at the gate of the school-house. " James," she said, solemnly, " I do, I would do nothing that I would not tell you, which you have the right to know. But spare me to-night. Nay, you must not enter," she said, so firmly that he yielded, though with a muttered oath and threat that he would make her repent such conduct. Left alone, his first thought was to rush to William Wood and overwhelm him with reproaches. Was it possible that he could have been endeavouring to supplant him with Honor ? The bare idea of it well-nigh made him foam with rage. Yet he was handsome, though not handsomer than himself, and he was a gentleman born, and had a cer-

tain way and manner, and “ women were such fools.”

On calm reflection, however, many circumstances seemed to forbid this idea, and whatever had been the nature of Honor’s interview, he felt certain it had not been a pleasant one. Could Wood have insulted her? and at the thought his blood boiled again! But this idea, also, he rejected as improbable, and, terribly though it chafed him to wait, he made up his mind at last that it would be better to do so till the following morning, when he should see Honor, than farther to display their disagreement before the cynical, supercilious eyes of William Wood, whom in his heart James Carver hated.

CHAPTER IV.

THE following morning, Honor rose after a sleepless and feverish night, with burning eyeballs, a head aching to madness, and a heart torn with anguish. But there was no wavering in her mind. Even had it not been for the confirmation her worst fears had received from the hints and the acquiescence of William Wood, what she had seen of James Carver the previous night, the dreadful oath she had heard him utter, the coarseness of mind and the violence of temper he had betrayed during their short but momentous interview, would have been sufficient to determine her. She only wished the dreaded task were over, for in rending from her heart this unworthy affection, she felt as if she were uprooting

with it the very fibres of life itself. It was with some sense of relief she remembered, as she rose, that it was a holiday after the inspection.

Mrs. Keziah Sky, though age and infirmity had dulled many of her senses, and more especially her eyesight and powers of observation, could not, however, avoid noticing that her niece was looking ill, and she fretted about it all the time they were at breakfast.

“ You be a-killing of yourself, Honor darling, with them children. I said as how you would, long ago. You be a-worreting of yourself to death, you be. Oh, I wish as how you was married to that ere good lad as is a-going to make a lady of you. 'Twill be the happiest day of your old aunt's life, if I should live to see it.”

Poor Honor ! Every word her aunt spoke was like a stab in her bosom. She wished to tell her, as she knew she must, that the marriage was all over ; but she could not then. She felt, if she spoke, she might take a fit of hysterics, and she wanted all the nerve she could command for the interview which was approaching.

She had not appointed any precise hour, and she therefore did not know when he might come. The uncertain interval seemed terrible. Honor could not bear her aunt's anxious eye upon her. To avoid it, therefore, she furnished the old woman as usual with her working materials and a little table, and withdrew to the school-room, where she hoped her aunt might fancy she had gone to study.

Here she paced up and down the bare, empty apartment, in a state of agitation hardly to be described, her heart beating as if it would burst her bosom, and her temples throbbing with violence. Every sound made her start, and when the wind swayed the branches of the lilac-tree in her little garden, she fancied it was the shadow of James Carver darkening the window. Thus passed half an hour—appearing to Honor, however, to be three hours at least. Sometimes in her walk she stopped at the window, longing and dreading at once to see him for whom she waited.

The rain of the previous night had now ceased; but the clouds were heavy and lowering. A bitter wind still blew, bringing with

it occasionally great flakes of feathery snow, which melted as they fell. Honor gazed upon the shivering leaves and the shrinking blossoms, and in that hour of disappointment and distress she thought how their fate resembled that of all human hope and promise. For an instant her thoughts were diverted from her own individual anguish to the contemplation of the current and sum of all human woe.

A creaking sound as of a hinge, succeeded by the clash of a latch, distinct even through the whistle of the blast, roused her with a violent start from her momentary reverie.

The crisis of her fate had come. James Carver had arrived. She hastened to the door of the school-room, and met him in the passage which separated it from her dwelling-house.

James had come resolved to be firm and determined, and having made up his mind that this time Honor should not get the better of him. He felt that it was time to show her that he would not allow her to domineer over him, or, in his own words, to make her understand "who was to be master."

But when he beheld her haggard, anguish-

stricken countenance, and yet so resolute in its grief, he was cowed and frightened. He recovered himself quickly, however, for he, too, had great determination, and said with as much sternness as he could command :—

“ How now, Honor ! What is the meaning of this nonsense ? I will know at once. By ——,” he added, swearing again as he worked himself up into a passion, “ I will submit to this no longer. I have not loaded you with kindness and obligations, I have not offered to marry and make a lady of you—you, an obscure school-mistress, to be treated in this way. Don’t fancy because out of love for you I have seemed to forget them, I don’t know the difference in our positions, and know your own place, Miss Honor Sky.”

The coarseness of mind, the character of the man, without disguise displayed in this speech, restored to Honor the nerve and spirit which her agitation and suspense had deprived her of. They were now in the school-room.

“ I am glad,” she said, “ that you have discovered at the same time as myself that our positions and characters are unequal and unsuited. I wished to see you this morning

for the purpose of putting an end to an engagement which cannot possibly be productive of happiness to either of us."

It was said, and Honor drew a long breath.

James stood for the moment silenced and thunderstruck by this unexpected blow. The very event which he had meant to use as a threat, she had herself proposed as desirable for herself as well as for him. For the moment he was at fault ; but an instant's reflection convinced him it could only be a *ruse* on her part.

"Come, Honor," he said, "this won't do. You are not such a fool as you would make me believe. Only be reasonable, tell me what you were doing at Wood's, promise to be guided by me another time, and the past shall be forgotten."

"The past," said Honor, gravely, but more gently than she had spoken before, "can never be forgotten. It is far better for us both that we should part at once, as, were it nothing else, the conversation of last night and this morning has convinced me that I made a great mistake when I fancied we could be happy together."

It was almost impossible now not to believe Honor was in earnest—at least, at the moment. James fancied she was in a passion.

“I did not mean to affront you, Honor; but your behaviour was enough to provoke a saint, and your visit to Wood, without my knowledge, quite unwarrantable. You must acknowledge it, if you have any candour.”

“It might have been unwarrantable, James, had I had had any—had you left me any other way to satisfy myself on a point vitally affecting my happiness.”

“Vitally affecting your happiness! I really do not know what you mean!” he said truly, having, for the moment, completely forgotten their conversation of the previous afternoon, and utterly incredulous of the possibility of her attaching so much importance to it.

She now explained, and James, again losing all self-control, broke into a passion about what he called “Cursed female curiosity!” swearing at Honor and Wood in the same breath, and demanding furiously what the latter had told her. Honor answered firmly, though terribly shocked:—

“He told me nothing more than what I

had heard from yourself, which wanted to me confirmation ere I could believe it. He entered into no details or facts, nor did I wish that he should. Oh, he is a bad man ! Oh, James ! that I could persuade you to turn from such wicked companions and worldly ambition ! Oh, think how short and how poor this life is ! Oh, James ! do you never think of eternity ? ”

“ Eternity be hanged ! ” he cried, furiously. “ A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush ! How do I know there is any eternity ? ”

This was too much for Honor. The mask which James had worn so long he could maintain no longer. She beheld him now an avowed infidel — hopeless, Godless, loveless, earth-bound—and, as if by a flash of lightning, his whole life and character stood revealed. It was too much for her. She almost fainted, and was obliged to hold by one of the desks for support. She had only power to say :—

“ Farewell—farewell for ever ! ”

“ Are you really in earnest ? ” he asked ; “ for, by ——, if once cast off, you will not find me come back. I am not made of the stuff you suppose me.”

“I am in earnest—in earnest, though my heart should break.”

“Very well, then, miss. Take care you don’t repent when it is too late—that is all. Good bye. I leave you to your school-keeping, and to the pleasant reflection, in the long life of labour before you, that you missed one of the best matches in the county by your own ill-tempered folly.”

As he spoke, his face grew white—almost livid—with rage, and a dark, sinister look shot from his eyes.

A dark suspicion had stolen into his mind.

He determined to watch William Wood and Honor narrowly.

Honor had held out till he was gone, but, ere the house-door had closed behind him, she sank on the floor with a groan of anguish, which was cut short by her falling into a dead faint.

How long she lay thus she never exactly knew, but it must have been a long time, for when she came round, she was so benumbed with cold, she could scarcely stir a joint. Like all persons recovering from a swoon, she could

not remember at first where she was, nor the scenes which had immediately preceded it, but as she sat up and looked round, memory, with its train of miseries, returned to her.

But they appeared to be too great for her mind to embrace. She felt so stunned and bewildered by them, as to be incapable of realising them. Then she thought of her aunt, and, rising, went to find her. She had no idea of the time, nor of how long she had lain in the swoon. It might have been an hour, or it might have been a day. She found her aunt still in the arm-chair in the little parlour, but she had fallen asleep over her knitting and the fire had gone out. Honor felt glad she was asleep, but fearful lest she should catch cold, began to re-kindle the fire.

She felt hardly able for the task; her knees trembled under her, her hands shook, her head swam, and all objects round seemed to dance before her eyes. She got the wood however, she placed the coals on it, swept away the ashes, and applied the match, at the risk, several times of falling under the grate. She endeavoured to make as little noise as possible, lest she should wake her aunt. At last, and just as she

was concluding her labours, she nearly lost her balance; falling against the tongs, they knocked down the rest of the fire-irons with a loud clash. Honor drew a long, startled breath. She expected, as she sank down for an instant on a low stool in the chimney-corner, to see her aunt wake up in a fright. But to her surprise she did not even move. The noise, loud as it had been, did not even make her start in her sleep. Honor looked at her in some surprise, which quickly became converted into a feeling of vague alarm.

Mrs. Keziah's knitting lay on her lap as if it had dropped from her hands, which were still turned towards it as in the act of holding it. Her head was bent down on her breast in a fixed and immovable position.

Now that Honor looked more narrowly at her, there appeared to be something uncommonly stiff and rigid in her whole attitude. For a second she sat upright on her stool and gazed at her with intense eagerness, her personal griefs scared away for the instant by the sickening dread which stole into her heart. She held her own breath to listen for that of the old woman. But no sound broke the

oppressive silence. She rose and bent over her.

“Aunt Keziah—Aunt Keziah!” she moaned beseechingly; “it is your own child. She has none but you—oh Aunt Keziah!” she added, with a wild sob.

But no answer came from the cold, white lips, and when Honor took her aunt’s hand, she started back from the chill touch. And then she cast herself on the floor in an agony of desolation, crying aloud:—

“Have I not one in the wide world?”

Then she essayed to rise that she might call for help to perform the last duties to the Dead! She had proceeded as far as the threshold, when, exhausted with fatigue and anguish of mind, and having caught a violent cold and fever from the expedition of the preceding evening, she fell once again, deprived of her senses.

CHAPTER V.

IN a small and tidy chamber with a sloping roof and storm-windows, Honor Sky woke one morning from what appeared to have been a sound and quiet sleep. She looked round as one not certain whether she were sleeping or waking, and whether the objects she saw were substantial realities or the mere fantastical fabrics of a dream. And yet she had a dim recollection of having seen the little chamber before. The dimity curtains, spotless though scanty, the window through which peeped clusters of monthly roses, the green, half-drawn blind which mellowed the sunlight, now streaming into the room, the tiny table with its snowy cover and small looking-glass, all seemed not altogether unfamiliar to Honor Sky.

Yet it was no room in her own home, of that she was certain. On the table there was a glass full of flowers, roses and pinks, which surprised her in a faint kind of way, for she had a confused notion that it was winter.

She sat up in her bed to be sure she was not dreaming; but she quickly found she could not support the position for an instant, but fell back again, weak and helpless as an infant. Then her eye fell on her hand as it lay on the bed-clothes, and she could hardly believe it was her own—it was so wan and emaciated.

It was clear she had been ill—very ill, she suspected, and as she made a feeble effort to recall the past, a dull, shapeless sense of misfortune weighed upon her spirits. But the effort, weak as it was, was too great for her enfeebled powers, and she sank again into a kind of slumber. When she woke next, the curtain at the head of her bed was drawn, but she could see between it and the light from the window the shadowy outline of a female form. Feebly she asked:—

“Who is there?”

She heard a long breath drawn like a sigh

of relief, and then a hand, gently sliding back the curtain, disclosed the sweet pale features of Mary Austen. There was an anxious, half frightened expression in her face, as she bent over Honor, and whispered:—

“ You are better, dear, are you not ? ”

“ Better ! ah, I thought I had been ill ! But why am I here ? Where is Aunt Keziah ? ”

“ Never mind, darling,” Mary answered, tenderly, but looking more and more frightened, “ only think of getting well now. Frank and I have been so anxious about you. You are everything to us. You are our sister.”

Honor was too weak to have any very intense feeling, either of joy or sadness, just at that moment, but Mary’s words were like a gentle, soothing balm, and with a grateful look, she nestled down among the pillows, resigned for the minute to think of nothing. After a brief pause, however, she said again, as if she were haunted by a puzzling notion :—

“ I thought it had been winter. Is it summer ? ”

“ You forget, dear,” Mary answered, some-

what incautiously, “it was only wintry weather. It is June now.”

A sudden flash of memory lighted momentarily the pale face of the sick girl, which fell again instantly, as if struck by a thunder-bolt.

“Oh!” she exclaimed, and looked up into Mary’s face, as if to ask, “can it be true?”

Poor Mary’s tears were flowing fast. Honor read no comforting denial in her face, and burying her head, she murmured:—

“Oh, why am I living?”

“For us, darling,” said Mary, “for many good things in the world. It could not do without you, Honor.”

“I shall never be of any use to anybody again. Oh, I am so weary—so weary.”

“Shall I leave you, dear? or shall I read to you.”

“Don’t leave me—don’t leave me alone, I cannot bear it now.”

Mary sat down, and, taking the Bible, read in her own soft, melodious voice the fourteenth chapter of St. John’s Gospel and the 116th Psalm. But she knew not whether the infinite tenderness and lofty comfort contained in the

words ever reached the heart or the understanding of the stricken sufferer. At first she moaned in low hysterical passion, and her poor weak frame was shaken with faint, convulsive sobs. By degrees, however, both subsided, and Mary's voice, if not what she read, soothed and subdued her, and once more she was lulled into rest. Mary stole down to her husband to tell him what had passed, and to confide to him her alarm and anxieties.

He was not without his, too, but he was more hopeful than Mary. Neither knew what had brought her into the sad state in which Frank himself had found her on the day of her Aunt Keziah's death, when he had gone down to speak to her about some matter connected with the inspection of the previous day. Much shocked, he had procured assistance immediately from the horrified neighbours. An inquest had, of course, been held on the body of poor Aunt Keziah, who had been decently committed to the grave, and Honor had been removed to the Vicarage, where she had been tended like a sister by Mary herself.

Frank had thought it right, under what he had supposed to be the circumstances, to in-

form James Carver at once of her illness. His answer was curt.

“He had no concern with Miss Sky whatever, and thought it right to inform Mr. Austen he was not to be chargeable with any expenses he might incur on her account.”

Frank and Mary saw at once from this message that all was not right. It seemed to throw a light on the cause of Honor’s illness. Mary’s heart bled for her old favourite, and she spoke of James Carver in terms of indignation very foreign to her usual gentleness.

“I make no doubt he has jilted poor Honor for the sake of somebody whom he thinks richer and greater. He is just the kind of man to do such a worldly thing. I always thought so, and I cannot say I am surprised. One comfort, however, is, she is far better without him. ‘Better is a dinner with herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith,’ ” said Mary, quoting what was, with her, a favourite text, and looking fondly in her husband’s face as she did so.

“There can be no doubt she is far better without him, for such a woman as Honor Sky

would be miserable with such a man as James Carver; but what would you say, Mary, darling, if she had discovered this already?"

Mary looked up surprised. The idea had not struck her. Frank continued:—

"I doubt if he has jilted her. There is mortification as well as wrath in his answer to us. But time will shew us."

Honor had lain ill for three weeks—part of the time in a very dangerous state. The doctor, though not an unskilful man, could not quite understand her illness. Physically, it seemed to be a low, lingering fever, partly the effect of cold, but he could not doubt that it was complicated with some violent shock to the nervous system—perhaps the sudden death of her aunt. Was she of an excitable, nervous temperament?

But when Frank and Mary answered that she was not so by any means, but possessed, on the contrary, great strength of mind, united with warm feelings, he was quite puzzled, and could only recommend that, when her senses returned, her mind should be kept as much as possible from agitating topics. This, poor Mary was now nervously

anxious to do, and there seemed some danger that her very anxiety might defeat itself.

During the weeks that Honor had lain at the Vicarage, a great, but, at that season, not uncommon change, had taken place in the outward aspect of Nature. She had not been laid two days on her sick bed ere the wind changed and began to blow gently from the south-west, and the May sun shone warm and golden during the long bright day. The young leaves unfolded their tender green, and the apple blossoms spread themselves over the orchards in sheets of pinky white. The pink wreaths of the almond trees, the scented cones of the lilac, and the golden tassels of the laburnum came and went in fair succession. Now the roses were in bloom on the cottage walls, the tall lily and the bright pink decorated the flower borders, and the spring gaiety of the woods and shrubberies had begun to give place to the quiet shady green, so grateful to the eye wearied with the glare of the summer's sun. When Honor had been stricken down, it was winter; when she rose again it was the height and glory of the year.

She woke again several times during the day on which she had first returned to consciousness, answered Mary softly when the latter spoke to her, submitted to take the food which was offered to her, or did anything she was recommended. Thus she went on for several days. As far as obedience was concerned, no one, the doctor said himself, could have had a better patient. But after the first day or two, he could not think it altogether a favourable sign. He should have preferred, he said, the display of a little self-will, or even fretfulness, to the apathy and hopelessness her present unqualified, unreasoning submissiveness appeared to manifest. In body, she was certainly gaining strength; but he could not hope to see her well till her mind was roused, and he suggested that it might now perhaps be better to awaken even painful feelings than to permit the continuance of her present apparent deadness.

This was a task for poor Mary. She hardly knew how to commence it, and the more she thought of it, the more the difficulty appeared to increase. Each time she entered the room, it was with a little plan for break-

ing the ice, which each time circumstances seemed to render impossible to put in execution. Honor had apparently such an absence of all wish or intention to speak about herself, or indeed to speak at all, that the undertaking would not have been an easy one for anybody, and for poor shy, timid Mary it was well nigh impossible. Honor was now able to be removed down-stairs in the day-time to a room which was generally used as the day-nursery, but was at present appropriated to her use as sitting-room.

It was a pleasant, cheerful little apartment, with a casement window opening on the garden, now bright with flowers. A sofa had been placed near it for the invalid, and Mary took care she should always have a glass of fresh flowers beside her on the table, and books and work if she chose. But, contrary to all Mary's previous experience, Honor appeared to have no wish for employment—for reading more especially. Once or twice she tried a little crochet-work, but soon laid it listlessly aside, as if the smallest exertion were a burden to her. She would lie for hours watching the shadows on the lawn, or the birds hopping from

twig to twig, or the play of the leaves in the breeze and sunshine, not with interest or admiration, but in a sort of sad, mechanical way.

Poor Honor! She was, indeed, as unlike as possible the Honor of former days. All her strength, bodily and mental, seemed to have been exhausted in the one gigantic effort she had made. She believed herself that her life was over, and that she was dying. The idea would have given her pleasure, had it not been for the fear that she was not ready to die. She thought she believed, but she felt no love, no hope, no desire for anything but rest—rest from the weary images which chased each other through her brain, rest for her fainting limbs and her aching head, rest for her lonely, tortured heart.

She perceived all the kindness and devotion of the Austens, but she fancied she could not feel grateful for it. She attributed what was chiefly physical languor and feebleness to ingratitude and unfeelingness, and it depressed her to a point unbearable.

Then a feeling of faithlessness in everything would seem to overpower her. The thought

of James Carver filled her with a shuddering horror. The recollection of the blasphemous words she had heard him speak, and which she could not get rid of, haunted her evermore. They still seemed to sound in her ears like a voice of doom from the pit of Gehenna. She felt that she could not speak of them. They were like a perpetual nightmare which sealed her lips, while it oppressed her with an unbearable load.

The weather was now hot as well as brilliant, and it appeared to Honor that the warmer and the more beautiful it became, she felt the more wretched. The sweet, dewy morning made her sad unto tears, the melody of birds was as a strain of unendurable melancholy, the bright noonday made her sick and bitter, but—

Most she loathed the hour
When the thick-moted sunbeam lay
Athwart the chamber, and the day
Was sloping towards his western bower.

Then in dreariness, equal to that of Mariana—

She wept, “I am aweary, aweary,
O would that I were dead.”

It was not that she regretted for an instant

the step she had taken, but in tearing her unworthy love from her heart she appeared to have torn with it hope and happiness and energy. The very power to feel seemed to have been exhausted by that burst of agonized feeling which had issued in her illness. Nor did she seem, as she looked around, to see consolation anywhere. The result of the school inspection, which she had at first forgotten amid greater sorrows, she remembered now with much depression. In the present state of her spirits, it seemed to her to shut the door of hope and exertion in the only direction in which she could have hoped to exert herself. Her aunt, too, was dead—the kind, old aunt, on whom she had once hoped so fondly to have bestowed every care and comfort. It seemed now that she had no one, nothing to care and live for, that, young though she was, her day was done and her work over. She was only a burden to the Austens, and a burden she was well aware they could but ill afford. Oh, why did she not die? And then she feared it was wrong to wish it. Did not God know best? And poor Honor wept penitent tears, and tried to pray for a better spirit, and for more faith

and more resignation. In these hours of terrible depression, it appeared to her that her's had been altogether a profitless and useless life, and the burden of her soul, as she lay wearily on the sofa, gazing out on what appeared to her the dreary, mocking brightness of all around, was—"Vanity of vanities—all is vanity."

If she read anything at all, and the Bible was the only book she ever did read, she generally turned to Ecclesiastes. It was sad, indeed, to see the change which illness and grief had made even in her personal appearance. Her emaciated figure, her transparent hands and thin, delicate fingers, were only too fitting accompaniments to her pinched features, her languid eye, and listless countenance. A stranger contrast could not have been imagined than she presented to the blooming, lively, energetic Honor of by-gone-days, always hopeful, always cheerful. Mary and her husband both longed to know the state of her mind, and at last the latter resolved to make an attempt himself to fathom it.

It was one afternoon, just after Honor had had her tea, when she was watching, sick at

heart, the "thick-moted sunbeam," that she heard a low tap at the door. Her gentle but uninterested permission to enter was obeyed by Frank Austen. It was the first time Honor had seen him alone since her illness. He generally came for a few minutes with his wife after breakfast to inquire for her, and then she did not see him again all day. She felt a little surprised to see him now and alone.

"I have come to have a little chat with you, Miss Sky," he said, "if it is not too much for you. But I think it will do you good."

"Thank you," Honor answered, feebly; "you are always kind. I do not deserve your goodness. I wish I was more grateful."

"Dear Miss Sky, it grieves me to hear you talk so. I owe you as much gratitude as you owe me. I have often thought I don't know how I should have got on in Thornbury without you."

"Without me! What have I done? I have failed in everything—even in the school where I thought I had succeeded. Ah! I was vain and proud, but I am humbled now."

“But you did succeed, Honor, let all the inspectors in the kingdom say what they please. And you have succeeded, too, in gaining the affection of the children themselves to an extent which has surprised me. They are anxious to hear of your welfare, and eager for your return to your duties. God still opens for you a noble career of pleasant duty. I know you, Honor, and I know, in time, whatever your sufferings may have been, this will console you for them.”

Honor’s tears began to flow fast; but she was consoled a little even then.

The result of the inspection did not appear to her in so dire a light as it had done ever since she began to think of it. The children liked her too. She had not fancied that. Frank’s buoyant tone did her good. For an instant, the terrible subject which had filled her mind gave place to other ideas, and, beyond the dark cloud which it had interposed, she obtained a glimpse of a life endurable even on this side of the grave. She was too feeble, however, to seize it with energy, and soon it seemed to vanish. She sank back, weeping and crying:—

“ Not for me—not for me ! ”

“ Shall I pray for you, Honor ? ” asked Frank, “ and with you ? ”

Honor assented, and, kneeling, he prayed earnestly that her mind and body might be strengthened, and that, if she had done right, she might be so supported as not to regret it—to persevere in the right, nothing fearing, nothing doubting, looking to Him who had been the beginning of her confidence, and trusting in Him to the end.”

At first, Honor only listened and wept, then she tried to join in the prayer. When it was over, she said :—

“ Thank you ; it has done me good. You almost seem as if you—as if you knew.”

“ I can guess, Honor. It is your own doing, is it not ? ”

“ Yes, yes ; but don’t ask me why—I can never tell.”

“ I will not ask you why ; but I am sure you have acted wisely and nobly ; and, believe me, the day will come when you will feel that you have not suffered in vain. Honor, I rejoice to see you restored to the work for which you were made. I rejoice to learn that



you have freed yourself from a destiny unworthy of you. I rejoice that you have been enabled to choose one, in God's eye, whatever it may be in that of the world, so much greater and nobler. Never forget for a moment that it is nobler and greater. Never for a moment cease to strive for the victory in so noble a race. You may be weak, but God and Christ are strong."

Frank spoke with eloquence and feeling, for he spoke from his heart. Honor was roused at last. Her face glowed once more with the light of past times. She clasped her hands, and, as she raised her eyes for an instant, she seemed to be making some inward resolution. Frank hoped his point was gained.

And so it was, in a great measure. Fits of despondency, it is true, Honor had frequently after the interview recorded above, but she seldom yielded to them without a struggle; and, by degrees, they became less frequent and of shorter duration. She was grateful now for Mary's society, and would strive to take an interest in parish and domestic affairs. She occasionally, too, would walk in the garden, or relieve the nurse of her duties, by

playing with the baby on the grass. She frequently employed herself with her needle, though books still appeared to have no interest for her.

In ailments of the body, there is no such resource and alleviation as mental occupation ; but, in those of the mind, it would generally seem that, at first at least, bodily employment is more efficacious and practicable. Realities are for a time too engrossing to be driven out of the thoughts by mere ideas.

At last, one day, to the great joy of Frank and Mary, Honor proposed returning to her school. They agreed to her proposal at once, only insisting that, for a week or two longer, she should sleep and spend her leisure hours at the Vicarage. They feared for her, yet, the solitary evening hours, with no Aunt Keziah to occupy her thoughts. Honor, though fearful of trespassing on their kindness, accepted the invitation for a few days, till she had made trial of her own strength.

And once more she returned to her vocation—"her vocation for life," she said to herself.

CHAPTER VI.

IT was past midsummer when Honor returned to her lonely little dwelling. The very attempt to recommence her accustomed labours did her good, and each day her strength increased, and with it her exertions. But the elasticity of her spirits did not so quickly return.

It seemed to her now that mortal existence was but one long endurance, and she blessed God who had shown her a life beyond it, and to which she tried to look, when her spirits were weary and her heart was sunk. In appearance she was much altered. She looked many years older—not so much perhaps because the rose had paled upon her cheek, or because her figure was thin and drooping, as because the

sunshine of youth had faded from her countenance, which, though sweet and affectionate as ever in character, told of the wear and tear of life, of hope disappointed, and of trust shaken to its foundations. She dreaded the long hours of solitude which awaited her when she should have given up spending her evenings at the Vicarage. She remembered the time when she had loved solitude, when some of her happiest hours had been those devoted to her own employments and her own thoughts. But it is only the happy who love to be alone. The companionship of our own thoughts must be pleasant when we court it. Whenever Honor Sky was alone now, either the painful past or the melancholy future was prone to occupy her. It was seldom that she could, for more than a few minutes at a time, fix her mind upon indifferent or abstract matters. Travels, history, science, had lost their interest, and even poetry and fiction had no zest, or if the former occasionally touched her feelings, it was with an appeal too real and sad to be safely indulged in.

Nevertheless, after one week, Honor gave up going to the Vicarage, except on Sunday.

At first, her evenings were even more heavy and oppressive than she had dreaded. She would sit with a book in her little garden, now in all the luxuriance of July, till tears would stream down her cheeks, and she would feel herself falling into the same state she had been at the Vicarage. At last she resolved to devote the evening, as long as it was light, at any rate, to working in the garden, and notwithstanding the heat, which was sometimes great, she kept her resolution. After the exertion, she felt more inclined to rest and read for an hour ere going to bed.

When there she slept much better.

So week by week Honor Sky improved in strength, both of body and mind. The heavy storm had passed, and though traces of its violence still remained, though the blossoms were gone and the leaves scattered, the noble growth, the vital vigor of the tree, were yet untouched. And what in the meantime had become of James Carver? As yet he flourished like the green bay-tree. His house was now finished and furnished, and Mrs. Winthrop, who made a descent upon Honor, some time after her return to her own house, ostensibly

to inquire for her, but really to pry into her concerns, occupied a full half-hour in describing it.

For some reason or other, she was evidently now a strong partisan of her former errand-boy, and Honor was astonished to find, remembering his detestation of his former mistress, that they were on terms apparently of the closest intimacy.

Honor's mind was not of that nature which enabled her at once to understand that, in a certain class of characters, the closest bond of union which can exist is that caused by mutual dislike. Mrs. Winthrop had discovered that Honor's engagement to James Carver was broken off, and that "the Austens took Honor's side," consequently she made up her mind at once, that "Mr. Carver must have a good reason for what he had done," for that Honor had done it, of course Mrs. Winthrop would not believe. Accordingly she took an opportunity of writing a polite note to James Carver, under pretext of inviting him to subscribe to some charity. The note began, "My dear sir," and concluded by inviting him to drop in any evening, and take a cup of tea.

James Carver made a wry face on receiving it; but a moment's consideration decided him to accept the invitation. He had lost the Austen party. To gain the Winthrop one was an object, and Mrs. Winthrop might do him some service. The flattering tone of her letter too, even while he saw its motive, was not without some effect. James Carver liked to be flattered, and flattery was to him a proof of the success at which he aimed. That all men fawned on the rising was part of his creed.

He drank tea with Mrs. Winthrop. She treated him as a son of whom she was proud, consulted him, sympathised with him, offered to help him in superintending the furnishing of his house, and look sharp after his servants, who always "took advantage when there was no mistress." As this belief was quite consistent with James' own views of human nature, he willingly availed himself of her aid, and repaid her for it by offering fruit and flowers from his garden. She tried in vain, however, to draw from him the secret of his rupture with Honor. He only said, in a general way, that he found "it would not do," that "his association with old days had misled

him," and under an appearance of pity and contempt for Honor, he veiled the bitter resentment which rankled in his heart—a resentment which was not free from the mad hatred of jealousy.

He could never divest himself of an idea that William Wood must have supplanted him in Honor's affections, and though both had denied it, and he could not discover that they had had any intercourse subsequent to the night on which he had met Honor returning from his lodgings, still, to his mind, such a reason seemed much more natural than the one she had assigned. It was one of his favourite maxims, too, that people never assign the real reason for their actions. Thus the irritation and dislike he had always felt towards William Wood, on account of his aristocratic airs, was aggravated into hatred. But this it would not have been expedient or politic to shew at present, circumstanced with regard to each other as they were, and, therefore, James restrained it, for with him expediency and policy were paramount to the strongest passions.

He was very glad, however, to think that

Mrs. Winthrop would not fail to describe to Honor all the glories she had forfeited. And, in truth, Mrs. Winthrop almost waxed eloquent when she spoke of Thornbury Lodge, for such was the name of James Carver's new residence. Her cold face, petrified into an expression of general dissatisfaction, looked almost pleased, and her pale gooseberry eye did for an instant appear to light up.

"It is a beautiful place—almost equal to General Mountford's, though the grounds are not so extensive; but they are done with such taste. If there ever was one of Nature's gentlemen, it is Mr. Carver. He has no false pride, and is not above being grateful to those who were kind to him long ago, when his position was a very different one. He is very glad to take advice, too, from those who are older than himself, which is more than can be said for everybody. *His* success, great as it has been, though, I am sure, it is not greater than he deserves, has not made him think himself wiser than anybody else."

Honor listened to this speech with weary ears and fretted spirits. It worried and depressed her even while she despised it. In

deed, to hear the mention of James Carver's name at all was like probing an unclosed wound. But agony though it was, she bore it with an unshrinking and even cheerful face, and tried to make some rejoinder, which would have been difficult even had she felt less. But she was destined to be stretched again on the rack of mental torture by her amiable inquisitor.

“The only thing Mr. Carver wants now for his beautiful place is a mistress, and that, of course, he will soon get. Half the young ladies in the neighbourhood are pulling caps for him—and no wonder, such a handsome man and such an excellent match, with such good principles of every kind. It is quite pleasant to see how regularly he comes to church, so few young men do.”

Honor faintly murmured something in praise of church-going in general, and then Mrs. Winthrop changed the subject by asking how the school was getting on?

“I hope it is getting on very nicely. Since I was ill, the children have come more regularly, and behaved better. They have been so kind since I was ill, that it has made me quite happy.”

No sooner had Honor said these words than she wished them unsaid. Mrs. Winthrop answered sourly :—

“Hypocritical little things! You are so young and inexperienced, Honor, or you would not be taken in by them. But I beg your pardon; I forgot for the moment you did not like to be told such things. You are so different from James Carver. As I can do you no good, I will bid you good afternoon.”

It was an inexpressible relief when Mrs. Winthrop was gone, but her visit had left Honor's spirits terribly depressed. It was Saturday, and therefore there was no school. She felt very sad and lonely, and took up a book in the hope of being able to drive away her sad and bitter musings, but in vain. Then she went out into her little garden. It was a September afternoon, fine, but autumnal. The sky was nearly covered with pearly-grey clouds—rents however in which disclosed here and there vistas into the deep blue beyond, while the wind ever and anon blew the grey veil over them, discovering in a new direction fresh glimpses into the fathomless depths of space. The breeze was not so strong as

to be disagreeable, but it waved the branches to and fro, and sighed amid the leaves with a mournful tone. The day was not dark or gloomy, yet there was no sunshine. It was the sort of day which, if she had been happy, Honor would have loved; but now its sweet gravity seemed to her melancholy. She sat down on her little garden-seat, and listened to the pensive music of the breeze till it brought tears into her eyes.

“How sad a thing is Life!” she thought. “I wonder if anything pleasant will ever happen to me again.”

The half-indulged, half-checked thought had hardly passed through her mind, when she heard voices at her garden-gate. She rose with a deep-drawn sigh.

“More people to bother me!” she thought, as she advanced to meet the party. The first glance shewed her, however, Frank and Mary, whom she had not expected to see, and at the second, she recognised her old friend, Mr. St. John, although it was so long since she had seen him, and he now wore a shovel-hat, which, at the first view, gave rather a different effect to his general appearance. But

it was impossible not to recognise at a single glance the slight, nimble figure, the animated countenance, and lively benevolent eyes of her old friend and protector.

In spite of her melancholy, Honor's heart beat with pleasure, mingled with self-reproach, as she thought of the repining question she had asked of her destiny but an instant before. Her eye brightened and her pale cheek glowed as the good Dean cordially extended his hand :—

“ Well, my dear young friend ! how do you do ? I am sorry to hear you have had an illness ; but we must expect many storms before we get into port, and I know of old the stuff you are made of.”

He spoke cheerfully, but he was in truth grieved to see how ill his old *protégée* looked.

“ I had to pass through Thornbury,” he continued, “ on my way to visit an old friend, and calling to mind that two such old friends as Mrs. Austen and yourself lived here, I arranged to spend an hour or two *en route*. I wished, too, particularly, to be introduced to Mr. Austen. And how comes on the school ? You see I have not forgot my old trade.”

Honor hung her head a little, and did not answer ; but Frank immediately rejoined :—

“ Wonderfully, I think, considering all our hindrances and disadvantages. Miss Sky has worked a miracle, but she feels disappointed because she has not had Mr. St. John to appreciate her labours.”

Frank then entered into a detailed account of Mr. Mauleverer’s inspection, which, though given gravely, was not unmixed with a covert fun and satire. Mr. St. John answered as gravely, and then asked to see the children’s copies, or work, or any specimens of their performances Honor might possess. They were now in the house, and she quickly produced what he wanted. He examined them carefully and critically, then laid them aside. He looked satisfied, and remarked briefly :—

“ I never saw anything so well done before in Thornbury school ; but, as Mr. Mauleverer said, these are the mechanical parts of education. To have learned to do anything thoroughly well and carefully is, however, a lesson in itself. But I fear I must go now. I return in a few days, and

will pay you another flying visit, if you will receive me."

His offer was at once received with a chorus of welcome, and Frank and Mary pressed him to remain over a night the next time he should come. After a second or two's consideration, he agreed, and then they all three quitted Honor's cottage to go to the train, and she was left once more alone.

The visit had left a pleasant impression. Honor felt livelier and more active. She put away the work and copies. Then she went into the garden, raked some borders, and tied up some flowers; and after being refreshed by a cup of tea, she felt able to read. It was so pleasant to think Mr. St. John was to be back again in a few days.

In the meantime, as they walked to the train, Mr. St. John said:—

"I am afraid something more than mere physical illness has been the matter with that poor girl, and I am sorry for it, as during the whole course of my life I never met with any one of whom I had a higher opinion, or for whose character I entertained a greater res-

pect. Surely it cannot be mortification at the inspector's report."

"No," said Frank, "that, I think, only weighs upon her spirits, because they are otherwise depressed. The cause of what she has suffered I do not fully comprehend; but I will tell you all we know."

He then entered into an account of Honor's engagement to James Carver, having first given a rapid sketch of that gentleman's rise of fortune, concluding with the mysterious manner in which the engagement had been broken off by Honor simultaneously with her aunt's death, and evidently at the cost of great suffering to herself. Mr. St. John seemed much interested, and remarked, as Frank concluded his hurried narrative:—

"The account you give me, I am sorry to say, confirms me in a prejudice in favour of first impressions with regard to character. From the first moment I beheld the child, Honor Sky, I formed a good opinion of her, which everything I have ever learned of her has only tended to confirm and enhance. My first impression of James Carver was of

exactly a contrary nature, but as he was, to all appearance, as clever and industrious a child, I could not conscientiously make any difference in my treatment of them. I shall watch the future fortunes of both with interest. Whatever may be the reason, it is well, indeed, that they did not marry, for their paths lie wide apart. And truly they shall both reap what they have sown."

The days which intervened between the two visits of Mr. St. John passed more hopefully to Honor than any days had done for a long time. The day on which he was to return proved to Honor's satisfaction a fine one. He was not to arrive till dinner time. Honor was to go to the Vicarage to take tea and spend the evening, that she might have the opportunity of meeting him. It was with a blither face and a more bounding step than was now her wont that she locked the door of her cottage and set off on her pleasant errand. It was a bright afternoon, late in September. There was not a cloud in the clear blue sky, and the sun was sinking in the soft, golden radiance peculiar to the season. There had been no frost yet, there was no wind, and the leaves

were still thick on the trees, as in summer, though the freshness and brilliancy of their hues were gone, and on the earlier deciduous trees the yellow leaf already began to prophesy of the desolate days to come.

This evening, however, was full of lowness. The air, in its brightness and calmness, seemed touched with a spiritual beauty, and Nature, after the toil and the heat of summer, appeared to repose in lofty tranquillity.

Honor walked quickly, for she was a little late. She took a short cut, too, by a back lane, which she was not usually fond of. She was just turning a corner, when she suddenly met, right in the face, William Wood, whom she had not seen since the night of her memorable interview with him. Indeed, as she rightly supposed, he had not been in Thornbury for the greater part of that period. He started, on seeing her, quite as violently as she did herself, but instantly stepped aside to make way for her with that air of polite deference and finished good-breeding which none knew better than he how to assume. He then bowed with an air of respect, which, agi-

tated as she was, she could not help noticing, and passed on without speaking.

The sight of him had awakened in Honor's mind the memory of many painful associations, or rather given again the vividness of recent occurrences to many scenes, which, though never for a moment forgotten, had begun to wear the pale hue of distance. For a few minutes, the prospect of drinking tea at the Vicarage, and enjoying the company of her early friend and benefactor, Mr. St. John, was driven from her thoughts. She felt more inclined to run home again, sit down, and weep; but she resisted the impulse—she valiantly breasted the returning wave of anguish—and, by the time she had reached the gate, was perfectly composed. The aspect of the cheerful group amid which she found herself, the affection, the respect with which she was received by each individual composing it, all contributed to cheer her; and ere she had finished tea, she had almost regained the spirits with which she had left home.

Indeed, without ostentation, it was the chief object of the whole party to make this evening pass pleasantly to Honor, and very

soon they succeeded. Honor had never seen Mr. St. John in this aspect before. As a child, she had venerated him as the greatest and most powerful of men, whose wisdom and goodness were something to admire at a distance, but whom she should never dream of approaching on familiar terms. As she grew up, this feeling, though much modified, still clung about her. She could hardly fancy Mr. St. John in any other capacity than that of a judge—a most kind and just one certainly, but still a judge, whose word was law, whose smile was happiness, and whose frown was doom. That she should be able to laugh and jest with him, as she did with Mr. and Mrs. Austen, seemed hardly possible. But all the judge was now cast aside—even the tone of prompt decision was modified into one of pleasantry, lively as well as wise. He detailed many of his experiences of life—and he had seen a great deal of it in various phases—English and foreign, high and low.

Honor was deeply interested; and her awe melting away entirely, at last and for ever, she began eagerly to ask questions with the old ingenuous modesty and frankness which

had charmed both Frank Austen and Mr. St. John when she was a child.

“And what class of persons do you think, on the whole, are the happiest—the rich or the poor? those who travel or those who stay at home? those who labour with their hands or those who labour with their heads? mechanics or clergymen? authors or tradesmen?”

“These are not the kind of classes,” he said, smiling, “of whom I should affirm happiness or unhappiness. As far as they are concerned, I fancy it is tolerably equally apportioned.”

“Ah, you mean that good people are happiest among all classes?”

“Yes, of course—yet I meant to speak less generally. I think those classes are the happiest who have a steady aim in life—an object they are constantly pursuing, and the greater and the purer that object, the loftier will be the quality of their happiness. When I say greater, I do not adopt the world’s standard of greatness; but it is my firm belief that this life is pre-eminently a life of endeavor, and to secure any portion of hap-

piness we must never relax that endeavor, but strive on to the end, faithfully, hopefully, cheerfully. Sustained effort is the secret of success in every walk of life ; artists, men of science, philanthropists, patriots, warriors, —Columbus and Palissy the potter, Robert Bruce and Elizabeth Fry, have all owed their success to unremitting, indomitable endeavor. And it is my belief that it is, too, the secret, not only of success, but of happiness. Even those, whose success has not met with the appreciation or the gratitude which it has deserved, have been happier in their earnest *pursuits*—I use the word as distinguished from achievements—than others are in their, perhaps, equally laborious time-killing, however intellectual or tasteful this may have been. The mind requires the repose afforded by the consciousness of an ultimate purpose, and where this exists it ought to be sufficient, as endeavour alone is ours. Results are God's. At the same time, it is also my unalterable belief that no honest and persevering endeavour ever was really unsuccessful. Providence, for our good, may hide the result from our eyes ; the seed we have sown may

not sprout till we have gone to rest ; but it is my earnest prayer that I may never cease to cherish the faith that while I labour, if not myself, others will yet enter into my labours."

Mr. St. John spoke with energetic liveliness, and with his bright eyes directed kindly towards Honor. She had listened while he spoke, with almost breathless interest. A responsive chord had been awakened in her bosom—a chord which had lately given forth but a feeble tone, but which now, as of yore, vibrated strong and clear. She did not speak, for indeed at that moment she could not, but her heart was moved to a strong, though voiceless, determination to dedicate herself, her time, her affections to the work to which she had all her life believed she had been specially appointed. A new light seemed to break over her mental vision. In the painful past she seemed to see only the hand of Providence removing the obstacles she herself had placed in her path,—to behold clearly the finger of God pointing out her true destiny. A new-born joy awoke in her soul. She would be miserable no longer.

Her countenance, ever truthful and

eloquent, bespoke her feelings. Frank and Mary felt that Mr. St. John's visit had not been in vain. For some minutes no one spoke. The Dean leant back in his chair. His countenance appeared to be in repose —a rare thing with him, as even thought with him seemed ever rapid, observant, and tending to immediate expression, rather than to silence or abstraction. And even now a close observer would have come to the conclusion that he was not engaged in any abstruse speculation, for his vigilant eye had none of the rapt, introverted gaze which betokens the inspired moment of the poet or the philosopher, but was fixed with keen, wakeful, benevolent inquiry on the face of the little school-mistress, as if endeavouring to fathom the thoughts his words had evidently called forth, and to give finish and exactness to his conception of her character. At last, Honor appeared to return to a consciousness of the actual scene around her. The Dean instantly removed his eyes from her countenance, and on his, as he turned towards Frank Austen, there was a significant and congratulatory expression of satisfaction.

Frank now proposed a little music, and having a fine voice, he accompanied his wife on the pianoforte. Then she played without accompaniment, while Frank found her music-books, and turned over her leaves, as if he had still been her lover.

In the meantime, the Dean drew near to Honor, and began to ask her a few questions about her school, and the prospects of education in Thornbury. Honor engaged in the conversation with the spirit of old days, and began in her turn to ask questions and advice with the zeal of one who is eager to omit no opportunity of gaining the means of achieving the great object of existence. At last the evening came to an end, and Honor set off on her return to her little cottage, happier than she had been for many a long day. New projects, new hopes, awoke in her mind, and the future, bright with activity, usefulness, and knowledge, stretched out before her.

The soft, full moon shone solemnly over the autumn woods, and though her heart was full of other and apparently unconnected subjects, she revelled half-unconsciously in the beauty of

the night. Somehow her thoughts were wafted away to Dredham, and she fancied how peaceful must the little church look now among the trees, and how sweetly the moonlight must rest on the graves of her parents. And as she had often done of late, she longed to see her early home once more, the old dame-school, the cottage where she had lived with her father, and the quiet churchyard, grave even in the sunshine, where the birds seemed to sing with a sweeter note, and where the distant boom of the sea came evermore on the ear like a solemn anthem.

She wondered too what kind of school there was at Dredham now, and feared much there was none better than there used to be. She longed to do something for her native place, and she felt that for her now the sum of human felicity would be to withdraw to that dear country village she loved so much, and devote herself, heart and soul, to the improvement of her own people. And it was with a sigh of regret that she started from her pleasant reverie, and reflected how unlikely it was it should ever be realised. Then she said to herself:—

“What thy hand findeth to do, do with thy might. God has given me my work here, and with all the difficulties and discouragements with which He has surrounded me, I will not despair, even in Thornbury.”

CHAPTER VII.

FROM the time of the Dean of Sudwich's visit to Thornbury, Honor Sky, to all appearance at least, recovered her health and spirits, nay, almost her former vivacity. As in the olden time, she entered with zest and spirit into all her employments. Again her daily task in the school became a labour of love, the success and well-doing of her pupils, a crown of rejoicing. Again the woods and the flowers, the blue uplands, the summer sunsets, and the starry winter sky were to her full of beauty and delight; again the world of books opened to her view realms of beauty which she panted to explore, and upon which she entered with the eagerness of a Cortes or a Parry. Life was to her once more full of interest.

It would be too much, perhaps, to affirm that Honor had never her times of depression —perhaps almost of despondency. Such periods come to most of us, even to the busiest ; but she never yielded to them now. She had no time for sorrow. Her daily employments imperatively demanded her immediate attention, and chased away the gloomy phantoms which sometimes threatened to invade her thoughts ; and the reflection that if she did not set to right then the children's work, she should have no time for the book in which she had been so much interested last night, or, if it were her time for reading, how she should regret, the next day, if she spent the hour she ought to have devoted to it in vain and unhappy musings, was generally enough to rouse her to exertion. For a long time she had shunned the solitary walk, which had once been such a pleasure to her, and found it wiser to bestow her leisure in working in her little garden, whose interests were less pensive than those of a ramble in the woods, where the glory of the sunsets, the loveliness of the lilies on the waters and the primroses in their mossy nests, not only awoke the memories of

scenes which she wished now to forget for ever, but were of themselves, apart from any association, conducive to emotions which, in our joyous hours bringing a melancholy which is only soothing, in those of sorrow are fraught with a sadness which is deepened into pain, and the effects of which are enervating and unhealthful. But when summer came again, and another year was past, Honor ventured once more to indulge in this long-forbidden pleasure; and great was her joy to find she could do so with safety.

One evening in June, after her early tea, she had taken advantage of the beauty of the weather to indulge in a longer ramble than usual. It was an hour at which the Thornbury people went little abroad, and she seemed to have all the loveliness of the evening and the scenery to herself. Allured alike by the bowery verdure of the wood-paths and the calm quietness of the open glades, she rambled much farther than usual—as far as a spot called Oakley Pond, a spot which she had long admired more than any other in the immediate neighbourhood of Thornbury.

In the centre of a grove of oak and ash, and bordered on one side by a margin of the softest and greenest turf, lay, now dyed by the red light of evening, a sheet of clear water, on whose still bosom reposed the broad leaves of the water-lily, the fair blossoms themselves folding their petals to go to rest with the woodland songsters. On the other side of this little gem of the greenwood were strewed about a number of felled logs, upon a rougher beach, in most picturesque confusion. Not a creature was to be seen, not a leaf was stirring, and the only sound to be heard was the song of a nightingale, who, while his feathered brethren were hushed in silence for the night, poured forth his solitary lay in one varied strain of purest melody.

Honor was entranced ; and, seating herself on one of the logs of wood, she remained, she hardly knew how long, lulled into a fascinating reverie. A pause in the nightingale's song was the first circumstance which recalled to her memory that it was time to go home ; and rising from her sylvan seat, and taking up the book she had brought with her, but which she had not been reading, she was returning to

the other side of the pond, when she was a little startled to perceive the figure of a man emerge from the wood just where she intended to re-enter it on her way back to Thornbury. To be sure, there was nothing very startling in the mere fact of a man making his appearance there at that moment, as the place was within an easy walk of the town, and the fineness of the evening was quite sufficient motive to account for anyone's presence there.

But what startled Honor was the resemblance she fancied the individual in question bore to William Wood, a man towards whom she had always felt a degree of suspicion and dread, and whom she would willingly have gone five miles out of her way to avoid meeting under the present circumstances. She had already, however, taken her direction too decidedly to retreat, so she walked boldly on, trusting it might not be he, as amid the deepening twilight, and beneath the shadows of the wood where the intruder now paused for a minute, it was impossible to see any object distinctly. Whoever it was, she trusted he would move quickly, as her homeward path led directly past the spot where he was standing.

But he did not stir. His whole attitude seemed rather to give the idea that he was waiting. And as she drew nearer, though as slowly as possible, she was much annoyed and almost alarmed to perceive that it really was William Wood.

As soon as she was within a few paces of where he was standing, he advanced to meet her, accosting her in the most respectful, nay, the most deferential, manner, and without the slightest remains of the sneer which she had always previously remarked in his bearing. Indeed she had never seen him look so little repulsive and disagreeable as he did now. The *roué*, slightly disreputable appearance too, which she had always been sensible of, though she could not have given it a name, seemed also to have disappeared.

It was now the greater part of a year since she had seen him last, and certainly the months which had passed had made in him a wonderful improvement.

He seemed to have risen, or rather to have returned, to another and utterly different sphere of life. Honor's dread of meeting him alone in so solitary a place vanished, but not her

annoyance, which was, if possible, increased, and she tried to pass on with a slight salutation. But this he would not permit, though the constraint he exercised was so polite as to be imperceptible.

“Good evening, Miss Sky. I see you are, as I should have supposed, an admirer of Nature. I longed to have had a pencil with me, that I might have sketched you as you sat on that log over there listening to the lay of the nightingale.”

Honor coloured with vexation to think she had been watched, and her companion, noticing her confusion, continued:—

“Nay, you need not blush for your romance; for once at least I could have sympathised in it, and sometimes I fancy I might again under happier circumstances—” then remarking that Honor tried to pass on, he continued:—
“You are courageous to walk so far alone. It grows late and dark now; allow me to attend you back, if not to your home, at least to the town.”

“Thank you. I am not in the least afraid. I am but a poor country girl, Mr. Wood, and not a young lady.”

“You are one of the few ladies whom Nature makes,” he said in a quiet tone, as if stating a conviction, and without the least air of paying a compliment; “and I doubt not could, like Milton’s ‘Lady,’ go anywhere you liked, ‘lackied by a thousand liveried angels;’ still, if not for your own sake, for mine, I should feel much gratified if you would accept my company, at least for a short distance, as there is something I wish to say to you. Indeed I have come to Thornbury for the express purpose.”

Honor looked at him for an instant with amazement, and almost suspected him of a jest at her expense; but his countenance forbade the idea. It was perfectly grave and serious. She could not any longer resist his accompanying her, and it was with a mixture of repugnance and curiosity that she tacitly permitted him to turn with her. For the first few paces they walked in silence, which Honor was resolved not to break, and which her companion appeared to have some difficulty in interrupting. At last he said:—

“I dare say, Miss Sky, you are surprised that I, who am a comparative stranger to you,

and whom you have hitherto seen under any but very favourable circumstances, should think of—of—consulting—confiding in you.” He paused, and Honor seeing she was expected to make some rejoinder, replied :—

“ I certainly am surprised, as I cannot imagine any possible subject or interest we have in common, and you, I should think, know as little of me as I do of you.”

“ Pardon me—I know much more of your character than you can know of mine, and all that I do know of it makes me feel that you are to be trusted as few are, as, indeed, I doubted till I knew you, if any were. Miss Sky, you possess much amiability, a strong mind, and above all, immovable principle. I never before met with these qualities united in one person. I know what you have given up, and why you have given it up. I respect you ; nay, I thank you for a great benefit. You have restored to me a faith I had long lost, for I found neither in myself nor in others anything to warrant a continuance in it. I have always been vaguely conscious of something within me—a better self—capable of being in every way something very different

from what I have ever been ; but when I found all the world the same as I was, except that most were more false and less unfortunate, I gave up the hope of ever living to this better nature. Nobody did, and that nobody could, seemed like a decree of fate till I knew you. For years I have not sought counsel or sympathy from any one, for I did not trust any one well enough to ask it. I know you are but an unpractised girl, ignorant of the world and its ways, and yet I would rather have your advice than that of any one. You see my act vouches for my word. Had I not still had some faith in goodness—in your goodness, I should not be here like a romantic fool, as I should have called myself some months ago, could I have believed it possible I should have placed myself in such a situation. I know I have no claim upon you. I come but as a beggar, to entreat for a crumb of sympathy."

Honor looked at him as he paused and gazed at her full in the face. There was still something haughty and disappointed, perhaps embittered in his mien. In what he said now, even, there was something which seemed to

show that he spoke from determination rather than spontaneously. He seemed to feel that in having so spoken he had humbled himself, and, like a proud spirit, ready to be resentful if he had humbled himself in vain. But Honor was much interested as well as surprised. It was not in her nature to doubt for an instant the sincerity of such an avowal, nor was she vain of, or elated by, the confidence expressed in herself. She took it quite simply and naturally. She believed there were many persons quite as trustworthy as herself. Mr. Wood had hitherto been very unfortunate in not meeting with, or at least recognising, numbers such, but it was fortunate he had met with her, since it had done him good, and she was ready, nay, eager, to do him all the good in her power."

"But how can I give you sympathy or advice," she said, "unless I know your circumstances?"

"But you will give it to me when you do know them," he said, and his eye brightened; "but," he continued, "my story has few redeeming points, remember. It is a tissue of mistakes, faults, and extravagances as well as

misfortunes ; my only excuse is that I have been at least as much sinned against as sinning. You expect a tale of error, don't you ?—and won't be shocked with the sinner, and leave him in contempt to his deserved fate, as most good people would do ?”

“ No,” said Honor, “ but,” and she coloured, “ I don't wish ; I would rather not be made the depositary of any secret which—which—”

“ Which it might wound your own conscience to keep,” he said, finishing her sentence for her, and colouring more deeply than she had done. “ Nay, Miss Sky, you need not fear that. I am a gentleman,” he added, with some haughtiness and displeasure in his tone ; then more gently, “ I have in truth no such secrets to communicate. My sins have been chiefly against myself. My secrets are such as to keep can do no one any harm.”

“ I beg your pardon,” said Honor, in some confusion.

“ No need for that. I will be as brief as I can with my narrative. I am then, you must know, the eldest son of a gentleman of good family and considerable landed property, which had been entailed on me by my grandfather.

My father was a good specimen of an honest English country squire, sensible in the main, but without much originality of mind. He thought and acted as he had been brought up to act and think, performed the usual duties, and enjoyed the usual pleasures of his station without a thought beyond. His wife—"my mother," and as William Wood spoke there was a marked, bitter emphasis on the last word—"was by most people, I doubt not, considered much the same kind of person as my father, and so she was in her tastes and avocations; but her passions were stronger, her will was sterner than his, and she had not the same manly fairness and unpretending justice which distinguished him; nor had she the same amiability of temper. I have said I was the eldest son—and I was in truth the eldest of a large family, whom the death of two or three, of some infantine epidemic, had divided into two portions—I and my next brother and sister having previously had the disease in a milder form, and the younger ones being still unborn. I have heard that mothers are apt to have a peculiar fondness for their first-born child.

Whether or not this is true in a general way, I know not, but certain it is, from the earliest day I can recollect, mine made a favourite of me, and I imbibed a notion that I was in everything superior to my brother and sister, who, I imagined, were born to serve and please me. Unfortunately, too, I was a quick child, and learned much faster than they did, which helped to establish in me more firmly a sense of superiority. When my father would ask why I was idling out of doors, while my brother and sister were hard at work in the school-room, my mother would answer proudly, and as if not quite pleased with the question, for she was a woman who could not brook a shadow of blame, and piqued herself on a stern adherence to duty :—

“Willie has done his lesson. He is so much quicker than the others.”

Then my father would answer that, “perhaps, a habit of steadiness and application was of more consequence than finishing any particular lesson, and that he did not see why Willie should have more play than the others.” Many things, too, that were considered wrong and punishable in the others,

were quite the contrary in me, and when there was any pleasure to be enjoyed—any party to be joined—in which only one could share, the preference was always given to me, “because I was the eldest.” I soon discovered that I could do what I pleased with impunity, and that a word of fondness repaid my mother for any concession. In short, I was aware that I was her tyrant—that my frown was what she could not bear, and that my smile made her happy. I was, as she said, a quick child, and I knew how to use my power for my own pleasure, and I laughed in my sleeve at the good reasons she assigned to herself and others for the distinction she made between me and the rest of the children. Not that you are to suppose from anything I have said that she was a cruel or unkind mother to the others—strict and exacting, perhaps, she was, but not cruel. No,” he cried, breaking off and speaking with passionate bitterness, “it was I to whom she was cruel. She ruined me without remorse that she might indulge her own feelings. Let no one call such selfishness love.”

He stopped for an instant, out of breath

with the vehemence with which he had spoken. Then turning to Honor, he asked gently, but haughtily :—

“ Do I weary you, Miss Sky ?”

“ No, indeed. I am much interested.”

“ Do you pity me then ?”

“ Yes.”

“ Well ! I don’t dislike *your* pity. I was never sent to school. My mother said I was too delicate, and I had been too much pampered to be very strong, and so I had a tutor at home. He was a clever man, but anxious to please my mother, and let me do as I liked. You may imagine, perhaps, that I learned nothing ; but such was not the case. I acquired a considerable stock of information by fits and starts, and as I was in the humour, for I had many intellectual tastes, some ambition, and a great deal—yes, I suppose I had, a great deal of vanity. For this reason, and in spite of my selfishness and self-will, which were not very observable superficially, I grew up rather a favourite with the world in general. I was frank, confident, handsome, and, I fancy, my occasional haughtiness, conjoined to the reputation I had for talent, rather added, in

the case of many, at least, to the admiration which was felt for me. Thus I went to college with no mean opinion of myself.

“At the University, however, I found I was by no means the great man I had imagined myself. There were richer, handsomer, cleverer, greater men than I there, and as I had been placed at an aristocratic college, I found myself a very small man indeed. My claims and pretensions were despised and laughed at. I was mortified and embittered, and sank into society beneath myself in every respect, but where I was still the great man. The usual pleasures and temptations of early manhood now assailed me. My tastes were luxurious, my passions strong, and self-denial was untaught to me, unthought of by me. I rushed into expenses of every kind with blind recklessness. I furnished my rooms in the most luxurious manner, with costly furniture, pictures, and ornaments. I gave incessant “wines,” where nothing was drank but the best and dearest, and I rushed into other extravagances which to you I need not particularise. My father’s allowance was, for his means, liberal, and my mother added to it every farthing

she could save from her own, which was liberal, too ; but still my funds were quite insufficient to meet my expenses. As you may imagine, my college career did not fulfil the hopes of my family. Still, if I had made no influential friends, and gained no distinction to further my views when I should enter parliament, I escaped without disgrace, for which, when it came to the last, I was abundantly thankful. But then there were my debts, which I had no means of paying, and the amount of which, with the pressing demands of my creditors, alarmed even me, who was prone to despise such things, and to be resentful at anything which worried me.

“ In this strait I had recourse to my mother, whom I plied with caresses, and filled with representations of the absolute necessity of such expenses to a young man of family and spirit, intreating her own aid and her help with my father, and saying, which was quite true, that I had no notion the amount of my bills would have been so enormous. I was perfectly successful with my mother. She did not question my assertion that the expenses I had incurred had been inevitable, consoled,

praised, and fondled me, and promised to arrange all with my father. He was not so manageable. Nay, at first he was very angry, refused to believe that I had not been unpardonably extravagant, and declared that he could not pay the bills without injustice to his younger children. My mother had ready her usual argument. 'But Willie is the eldest son, and has a right to be more expensive than the others.'

"To this my father would not agree, but he relented at last notwithstanding, telling me, however, that he would never pay another debt for me, and if I incurred fresh ones, it was at my own peril. For my father's harshness, my mother consoled me by redoubled fondness and indulgence. She was generally a good and affectionate wife, and in every affair in which I was not concerned, my father had, and with justice, great deference for her judgment. But when the matter had to do with me, he distrusted her, and, in truth, I believe I was the only cause of disagreement they ever had.

I had been some time at home when my father one day communicated to me his wishes

that I should choose a profession. He saw, he said, that I was not fond of country avocations, and he thought it very bad for a young man to be idle. I told him immediately that I wished to go into the Guards. This did not please him ; but he yielded up his own judgment to the united wishes of my mother and myself.

“A commission in the Guards was purchased for me, what was considered a suitable allowance was made for me, and I was launched on the sparkling waves of fashionable life. A summer sea it was to me at first—all brilliancy and fascination. It was very different from college. Gay young men courted me for my wit and good cheer, and the jolly devil-may-care company they met at my rooms ; beautiful women courted me on account of my handsome person and insinuating manners ; and their mammas smiled on their efforts to win my attention, because I was an eldest son, and reputed to be the heir of a large estate. All this was exactly what I liked, and for a time I enjoyed a kind of happiness. But it did not last, I grew weary of it. The smiles of simpering girls, and the jests of boon com-

panions, lost their flavour. I wanted something stronger and more piquante to interest me. I sought it in the society of women of a different class—from actresses and operadancers, on the turf, and at the billiard-table. The expenses incurred by the first kind of amusement I defrayed by my gains in the two last. For a long time I was so fortunate, that I came to calculate on my successes as quite a part of my income. But you know the old story, *Miss Sky*; the gambler's career has but one conclusion, and mine was no exception to the general rule. Not only did the fund fail whence I drew supplies for my other extravagances, but my debts of honour were of themselves overwhelming. The sense of disgrace strong upon me, I became more and more reckless.

“Then friends, or those who pass for such, began to look coldly on me. I fancied, and truly, I believe, that I was observed, pointed at, and that people whispered as I came near them. Young ladies, who had formerly bent on me looks of persuasion and admiration, now received me with glances saucy or compassionate, while their mammas were abso-

lutely rude. I was bitter and desperate, and so wretched, that the consciousness that the time had now come when my follies must be disclosed to my family, had hardly power to add a pang to my misery. I anticipated the whole story—my father's anger, my mother's intercession, and then all ending as I wished. This additional disagreeable seemed but a drop in the flood of my misery. I was not at that time—such was the extreme selfishness to which I had been trained—visited by any sense of the injustice to be done through me to my brother and sisters. I felt it afterwards, and now that I am able, I mean to restore to them all of which I have deprived them."

He spoke with a defiant haughtiness which Honor hardly liked. She thought, while she approved his resolution, that more humility and penitence of tone would have better become his position. He added:—

“Yes, they shall see, though they cast me off to perish, that I am not so utterly worthless and despicable as they thought me. They shall see I was not so helpless—that my fate has not been what they so kindly wished.

But"—he began in a calmer tone, and again waxing yet more wrathful than before as he proceeded, "I am not so incensed at them; though they left me as they thought to perish miserably, there was some excuse for them, but with her—my mother I mean—it was different—it was she who had wronged *me*. She had me of her own bringing up, and then she turned on the victim of her folly and selfishness, and accused him of ingratitude. No; I forgive them, but her I can never forgive."

His dark eyes, as he spoke, glittered in the dark. Honor shrank from him in dread, but nerved herself to say:—

"If you cannot forgive, Mr. Wood, your own mother, you must not expect sympathy or advice from me."

"Surely you do not take her part," he said more gently. "Nay, do not shrink from me—I would not hurt you for the world."

"I did not think of that," said Honor. "I felt—oh, Mr. Wood, if you do not forgive your own mother, who loved you once so dearly, how can you hope to be forgiven?"

"But if I *cannot* forgive her?"

“Pray.”

“Pray ! If I am to pray, you must teach me. But you have not heard yet how she used me. I wrote to her—my father answered the letter in her name as well as his own. My lawful debts he said should be paid, and no other ; but from that time forth, they both disowned me as their son. My debts of honour they would not recognise. I would not believe the letter—I would not believe that my mother could disown me—not, at least, if she saw me. I therefore hastened down, *incognito*, to—to my old home. I had left the train and was proceeding towards it on foot, when I suddenly met my mother and sister. I could see that my mother’s face was deadly pale and full of anguish. At that sight my heart smote me. All the recollection of her old affection came over me like a flood, and I felt towards her a tenderness I had never felt before. I threw myself at her feet, poured out my love and my penitence, and she spurned me.

“Spare me, Miss Sky, the details of that scene. I had come to her feet a penitent prodigal, conscious, indeed, of the wrong she

had done me, but forgiving it for the sake of her love. I rose, spurned, an embittered and revengeful man. I saw now all the selfishness of what she had called love, and I hated and despised it and her. And something like this I said, as, cast off by my family, I left them and cast them off for ever."

"And your sister?"

"My sister! she stood by, looking frightened. I think she was sorry for me; but she was a weak-spirited, narrow-minded little thing, who always thought as her parents and her youngest brother thought. I have no doubt it appeared to her all right, and that if she ever thought of me afterwards, it was only with a resigned sigh for the inevitable consequences."

"And did your brother—what sort of person was he?"

"Oh, a perfect model of propriety, with, of course, no compassion for such as I am; but, poor fellow!" and Mr. Wood's tone was far softer than Honor had yet heard it—"let us not speak of him. He was then dying, and has now been long dead. He could have done nothing for me, or, I truly believe, even with

an exaggerated sense of my wickedness, he would."

"It grows late and is very dark, don't you think?" said Honor.

"Do I weary you?"

"No; but it is late to be out—you are a stranger to me, and—"

"Oh, Mrs. Grundy, you mean! Well, I ought to have thought of her for your sake. You are almost at home, and I will not detain you another second, except to thank you for your kind attention hitherto, and to ask you if you will be so very good as to meet me again to-morrow evening. It will be a charitable work."

Honor hesitated, then with the natural ingenuous openness of her character, she answered frankly:—

"I do not like, for many reasons, to make an appointment with a stranger gentleman. In a person of my station it is considered wrong. Yet if I could really do you good—may I consult Mr. and Mrs. Austen?"

"Not for the world. You could not consult them without betraying me. You refuse, then, Miss Sky. You prefer the shadow to

the substance. You would not even *seem* imprudent to do a really good action. Well, everybody, I suppose, is selfish, and you are certainly less so than other people."

"I will meet you then," said Honor, "once ; but, oh ! I wish, for your own sake, you would consult the Austens. They are so good and kind."

"To you, perhaps—to the righteous and the just ; but not to me."

"You mistake," began Honor, eagerly ; but she suddenly stopped short, for just as they passed the corner of her little garden on their way to the gate, they were met by James Carver. He started, and his eyes gleamed with sinister passion from Honor to William Wood, and settled for an instant on the countenance of the latter with an expression of rage and hate. William Wood returned his glance with proud indifference, bowing slightly. James, long-accustomed to repress every outward demonstration of emotion, quickly recovered his ordinary shrewd, impenetrable expression, and made a slight inclination in return, without noticing Honor. She felt not a little perturbed inwardly, but she had long

nerved herself to expect such meetings, and this was not the first, though there were associations attending it which made it more than usually agitating.

“There goes my enemy,” said William Wood.

“Your enemy!” repeated Honor. “I thought he had been your friend.”

“Mutual convenience made us, as it makes many, associates; but there was never any love lost between us. I know too much of Carver to make him view me with a friendly eye, and besides, he is—”

Here William Wood stopped short, feeling that it would not do to tell Honor the other reason for which James disliked him. Honor did not, however, remark the awkward pause. She had been too much occupied with the earlier part of his speech to have noticed the concluding word or two. She asked:—

“Is not then your knowledge of each other mutual?”

“Not quite mutually disadvantageous,” he answered haughtily. “I confess circumstances have forced me to look on while others dipped their hands in the mire; but I have kept my

own clean. I have never forgot that I was born a gentleman. And now will you meet me to-morrow?"

Honor renewed her promise, and they parted at the gate.

Honor stood in her porch, looking out on the stars as they shone down on the church and the graves. "Born a gentleman!" she repeated, almost aloud. "Gentle birth is something then, since it can supply a motive strong enough to withhold from evil doing." Then, after a minute's pause, with her eyes yet fixed on the starry sky, she pursued her musing: — "Something for the welfare of society, but as a motive, in the eye of God, worthless."

CHAPTER VIII.

HONOR SKY had rather a sleepless night after her adventure. It had, indeed, interested and excited her in no common degree. Not that she liked, or even quite trusted, William Wood ; but she pitied him, pitied him even for his faults, and for his own blindness to many of them. Selfish he was still, and, she was inclined to think, would always remain ; for though he acknowledged it in a general way, and in relating his past history, she could see that self ever and unconsciously filled the whole current of his thoughts. Entire selfishness was the habit of his life, and though she could believe that he had laid aside his gross vices, and meant to live a correct and respectable life, she could not believe that this habit would ever

be changed. He seemed incapable of putting himself in the place of another person, so as to feel and think with that other. Yet as he had said himself, he was the victim of unjust and mistaken fondness, he had no one to advise him ; and if she could lend a helping hand to rescue a fellow-creature from the pit of destruction, was it not her duty ? He spoke, too, as if, in some measure at least, he had retrieved his fortunes, and she was curious to find how he had achieved this, and how he had been connected with James Carver. She could form no definite conclusion with regard to his character till she had heard to the end of his narrative, and though as yet it was a character which did not attract her, it had all the fascination of mystery. And even while his story and character were so distasteful to her as in some degree to be even repulsive, she was aware of a certain fascination likewise in his manner, in the tone of his voice, and in the glance of his eye, that is, when he so pleased. That he possessed intellect, and especially imagination, she felt conscious—indeed Honor had never in her life before been in the company of any one who seemed with her-

self more entirely to feel the poetry of nature.

Several times during the following day, while she was engaged with her usual tasks, she found her mind reverting to the interview of the past night, or anticipating the one to take place the same evening ; but she was accustomed to control her wandering thoughts, and lessons and duties proceeded as usual. She was glad, however, when the evening came at last, and, somewhat as one feels when one returns to the perusal of an interesting tale in which one has been interrupted, she repaired to her appointment with William Wood.

It was not so fine an evening as the previous one; yet still it had its own quiet charm. The sky was grey, and the air soft and fresh, though there was no breeze. It was rather later than when she had set out the previous evening, and in the woods every little tuneful voice was mute. Perfect silence reigned, and so softly the foot fell on the mossy carpet, that you might have heard even a twig drop. Yet amid this death-like stillness, the full life of summer reigned around. Exuberant verdure, myriads of flowers, the life-blood of nature

flowing fast and full through her innumerable arteries, her pulses beating deep though silently, testified that the picture Honor beheld, though still as the grave, was not that of Death, but of Life asleep.

And yet it engendered in her mind, peculiarly sensitive to such influences, a feeling of sadness and loneliness which was almost oppressive. She was quite glad to see William Wood emerge from a green, shadowless vista, where he had evidently been awaiting her, into the open path which she was slowly pursuing. He came up quickly, and accosted her with greater warmth and sprightliness than she had yet seen him exhibit.

“Good evening, Miss Sky. You are indeed a kind friend. I was longing for your appearance, for I declare I have felt for the last half-hour as if I had been borne down, almost stifled, by the universal greenness. The silence, too, has been too eloquent for me—it absolutely pains my ear. This scenery may be all very well for wood-nymphs, but for a mortal like me, it is oppressive in the very excess of its beauty.”

Again was Honor struck with one coincidence

between her feelings and those of this strange man—a coincidence which, in her limited experience, she had never met with before, and which therefore she imagined much more rare than it really was.

“I was feeling much as you do,” she replied.

“Ah, then,” he answered, “you have some feelings in common with me.”

Honor did not reply. She was, in truth, thinking how strange it was that they should have any feelings in common, when the majority of those they had were so very different. She did not, however, say so, and William Wood, having paused as if for a rejoinder, continued, in a more business-like tone :—

“I fancy I must now make the best of my time to finish my story, as I suppose you would neither like to be late out, nor to give me another meeting.”

“No,” she answered, simply, “I could not meet you again.”

He frowned; but his countenance cleared up quickly, and, without further preface, he began :—

“Repulsed, as I have told you, by my

mother, when I had approached her as a real penitent, and with far more love and gratitude towards her in my heart than she deserved from me, I withdrew, maddened. It seemed to me that my own family had closed the door of hope upon me, and left me no career but that of crime. My mind was filled with rage and hate towards all the world, and more especially towards her who had been most my enemy. In desperation, I hurried abroad, where, chiefly at German watering-places, I led a vagabond life for some time, living from hand to mouth, I hardly knew how, sometimes by rouge-et-noir ; but, in justice to myself, I must say I was never guilty of any dishonourable practice, though I do not deny I was often tempted. But I never forgot I was born a gentleman ; and, as soon as I had time to reflect, a burning, insatiable desire was awakened in my soul, to restore myself to my lost station, to regain my fortune, and to set my foot in triumph on the necks of those who had spurned me."

And William Wood spoke even yet with fiery resentment. His tone, his ireful glance, made Honor tremble. It appeared to her

that it would be a fearful thing to incur the vengeance of such a man.

His eye caught hers as he paused ; and, his countenance softening marvellously, he continued :—

“ You disapprove of me, I see.”

“ Not of your determination to regain your old position, if you could do it by just means, but of—”

“ Well, let us leave that for the present, and do not leave out of your memory how I had been tried. To achieve my object abroad seemed impossible, so I returned home. And yet, at home, it seemed equally impossible. I had no professional education, no funds, no introductions. I was a disowned, wandering beggar. It was in this condition that accident brought me acquainted with James Carver and some of his associates. They are mostly men of low origin, though some of them are moneyed men, and some of them not badly educated in a certain sense. None of them, however, were men of birth or University education, and it chanced at that time they were in want of a person of this description who would serve them for low pay. This I

gladly did, not so much on account of the present emolument as on account of the prospect of future wealth which their schemes opened up even to me, and I would have fed like the prodigal in the parable on husks, to have had the chance of regaining what I had lost. And yet, Miss Sky, I must, in justice to myself, tell you, that not to regain my paternal acres, or even my lost position, could I have acted as Carver did when you were so displeased at that time which first made you known to me, and which has not only given me a better opinion of your sex, but of human nature. Till that circumstance, I had thought men bad and women worse—that is, I thought them all equally selfish and unprincipled, but women seemed weaker, sillier, more unreasonable and perverse than men, their follies and wickednesses oftener the result of mere caprice than those of the other sex. The one seemed to be bad because it was their interest, and the other because it was their pleasure. I did not believe in you at first, though I saw you had understanding, spirit, and eloquence far beyond the average of mankind, but after that night I watched events closely, and I un-

derstood it all—I understood that you had truth, goodness, and feeling, that you had a noble heart and strong mind—that you were such a being as I have not believed in since I was twelve years old. But I will go on. Suffice it to say our speculations have been successful. Month by month, and year by year, I have seen my fortunes grow—I have beheld the time approaching when I should resume my own name, my own place, and even my own patrimony. Yes, Miss Sky, strange enough, I discovered that my family estate had passed into the hands of a member of the very company I was connected with. He was easily induced to part with it to me by a small profit on the original price. It is now mine once more.”

He spoke with pride and triumph.

“And did—did you—” said Honor, “I mean, was all your success, that of *all* of you, I mean, attained by—by—I mean—”

“I know what you mean, Miss Sky. It was not attained by disinterested knight-errantry, I am certain; but as far as I know, though, not being a director, I did not know everything, it was all gained on ordinary busi-

ness-principles. If we risked other peoples' money sometimes, we risked our own too. We did the best for all parties. We might have failed, perhaps ; but we have succeeded. It is but little I know of the secrets of trade ; and as I wish to know no more, I never make unnecessary enquiries ; and now I have given up the whole concern. I sold all my shares to repurchase my property, and now I am nothing but a country gentleman."

Honor did not look quite satisfied. Hesitating a little, she began, after a short pause :

" You said, Mr. Wood, you wanted my advice. May I ask you on what subject, as I feel that to-night I am a little tired, and do not wish to be out very long."

" Tired ! " he repeated, almost angrily, then added gently, " will you take my arm ? Do, Miss Sky—do honour me so ! " and his manner might have befitted a paladin of old addressing a princess.

" No, I thank you, Mr. Wood ; you are a rich gentleman—I am a poor school-mistress—a peasant girl."

" Forget that. You are one of Nature's nobles."

“Let me know how I can serve you?” she repeated.

For the minute William Wood looked disconcerted, and hesitated what to say.

“Serve me, Miss Sky! surely I said it was your—your sympathy—I wished to vindicate myself in your eyes, and, oh yes! I wished to ask your advice about the way I ought to resume my old place and name, and declare myself once more the equal of those who scorned me.”

“I know of but one way,” said Honor.

“And what is that?” he asked with interest.

“By paying all your debts, making reparation for any wrong you may have done, or caused to be done; by shewing your family and the world that they were mistaken when they cast you off.”

“By heaven! I am glad you have so much spirit; that is the very thing I want to do. Yes,” he added, setting his teeth, “I want to make them rue dearly their treatment of me.”

“But that is not what I mean,” she cried eagerly, and much shocked; “that will not

show them they have been mistaken ; it will only show them that you are worse even than they supposed, vindictive as well as selfish."

" You think me, then, so very selfish ? "

" I think you have been, Mr. Wood ; but now is the time to show that your selfishness has not been your own, but the effect of your education ; now is the time to show that you can be unselfish, generous, magnanimous—far above personal resentment—to show that the discipline of your Heavenly Father has not been in vain, and how much more loving He has been in his chastisement than your earthly parents in their indulgence. Ah," she cried, waxing more and more earnest, and her countenance glowing as she spoke, " you have asked my advice, and I must give it faithfully. Do this for God's sake, who has forgiven you, and you will obtain His blessing as well as the admiration and love of your fellow-creatures."

" Admiration and love, Honor ! Miss Sky, I mean ; to obtain your admiration and love I will do anything you please. Give me these, and as your slave I will obey you, for I swear I would give my life for you."

As he spoke, he stopped, and fixed on the countenance of the astonished school-mistress his large, passionate eyes, while his face became pale, and his voice tremulous.

Honor started back. She was so frightened that she held out her hands before her as a sort of protection.

“ Mr. Wood ! ” she cried, “ you forget yourself ; the difference in our stations ; our short acquaintance—the—”

“ Yes, Miss Sky ; pardon me—pardon my precipitation ; but I know not that I shall have another opportunity. You have said you will not see me again. I know you cannot love me now ; but think of me, think of me as one devoted to you for ever ; one who would give up everything for you, and think he gained in so doing. Think of me as one whom you might save and change. My character, I feel, is two-fold. I am not good ; I am not noble ; but I know I might have been, for I can sympathise with, and admire, what is noble and good. It is because you are noble and good that I love you. For your innocence and loveliness alone I should not have loved you. With you, I might be like

you : without you, I might be a devil. I will humble myself to my family, beg pardon of my mother to-morrow, if you will only promise to think of me, to let me visit you, to let me try to gain your love. Oh, Honor ! ”

She felt for him, but she was not moved.

“ I cannot deceive you. I have no love to give any one.”

“ But try to love me. Believe me, you could love me better than you ever loved another, for we have far more in common. Honor, in my true taste, in my real nature, we love the same things. We love poetry, we love sweet scenery, beautiful skies, the song of birds, the breath of flowers. To us they speak the same language. Even now, that solemn stillness of the wood ; stay—listen—does it not seem to shut us up alone together ? Are we wanting in sympathy ? Is my presence hateful to you ? Honor, dearly, tenderly loved ! Is my presence hateful to you ? ”

As he spoke he drew nearer, and his tone was lower, while she stood still, benumbed, fascinated.

“ I feel it like magic to be alone with you.

It is as I should wish to be all my life. Honor, I am, as you know, proud and ambitious ; but for you, I will give up pride and ambition. For you I will give up the busy throng of men—the strife after power and place, and wealth, and grandeur. I will live alone with you, cease to wish to be great, and try only to be good."

He looked in her face. His tones were low and persuasive, giving full effect to the natural melody of his voice. Honor was moved more than she could have believed possible. She herself was conscious of the kind of sympathy he had described, and she felt its fascination. He perused her speaking countenance eagerly. He fancied he had made an impression. He was not a person to be slow to fancy such a thing. He continued in a tone of greater encouragement, but not less tender :—

“ Another might seek to win you, Honor, by promises of fine houses, and clothing, and carriages, and I think probably another has, but I, who know you, know you are not to be won by such vulgarities—vulgarities which I only value for the power they bestow. Believe me, I, too, despise the gross sensuality which seeks

them as an end ; I despised it even when I indulged in it. I offer you, Honor, the means to do what I know would make you happy. Half of our income should be yours to employ as you please. Honor ! will you not listen ? Think what you might do for me and for the world."

For an instant even her reason was staggered ; but she recovered and answered kindly, yet with decision :

" I thank you, Mr. Wood, for your good opinion, and for the great sacrifices you would make for me. Indeed—indeed I shall not forget what you have thought of me. But I do not love you—our paths seem to lie in a different way, and though in some things we may feel together, I am sure, from all you have said, our characters are unlike. Unequal marriages, except in rare cases, are not desirable, and I believe the day would come when you would regret forming such a union. You are not the man to bear all it would entail upon you, and I am not the woman to bear your repentance. Let me go on—and forgive me. You have never denied yourself anything, at any sacrifice, and, now you have

taken a fancy to me, you cannot deny yourself that, even at the sacrifice of all you but lately so much esteemed. But as you regret now your former sacrifices to the desire of the hour, so the time would come when you would repent that you would now make. Forgive me if I pain you."

"You do me bitter injustice, but I forgive you everything. Honor, Honor, I think you could love me ;" and again he looked in her face with his dark, entreating eyes.

For an instant she turned away her head, then answered :—

"I know not what I could ; but I know I never *will*."

His eye flashed angrily.

"You are obstinate," he said, "and you sin against both yourself and me. What is it then you would do ?"

"Live as I am now living—devote my time and my life to a work which I feel is really mine, and in doing which I am always happy, when I do it with my heart."

"Have you taken then a vow of celibacy ? Do you think it wrong to marry ?"

"Oh, no, not if I loved—if the way was

clear, and all right before God. But I have erred once—and—I do not know—but I think I am not meant to marry."

"And what reward do you then expect for the life of arduous toil to which you have devoted yourself?"

"On earth, peace of mind, and—and—" her voice trembled, and a tear mounted to her blue eye, "I hope one day, before the assembled nations of the earth, to hear the Judge of all men say to me—yes, to *me*—Well done thou good and faithful servant,"—she stopped, overpowered by her feelings.

He looked at her in surprise, and as he looked, his anger vanished. It was impossible not to believe her sincere.

"Enthusiast!" said William Wood, yet with admiration in his tone, for never before, till that moment, had he felt so forcibly that Honor was beautiful. Her countenance seemed to him like the face of some fair saint in a mediæval picture, with blue heavenly eyes, and pale golden hair, like a glory. "Enthusiast! and will this hope, based on a world unseen and unknown, support you through sickness and solitude, through age and death?"

Will it supply to you the want of fortune and friends, of husband and children? Think, Honor, think!" and his tones and his looks were more eloquent than his words.

But Honor's mind was fortified by the ideas her own words had called up. She answered with much sweetness, which was accompanied by unconscious dignity :—

"I thank you very sincerely, Mr. Wood, for your kind opinion of me; but you must forgive my adhering to my resolution."

"Will you not see me again, then, Honor? Will you not let me try to win your love? Will you throw me back on myself, a hardened, ambitious, worldly, unforgiving man?"

"Oh, do not say that I do this. No one can do this but yourself. For my sake you could not be really good. For me you might alter your conduct, but you could not change your heart. I cannot do what I think wrong myself, to take the chance of making you do right."

She turned away.

"Farewell, then, Miss Sky, I will never sue twice."

"Do you leave me in anger, Mr. Wood?"

He turned round again. Some strong emotion seemed as if it had just passed, or had been suppressed.

“No, Miss Sky—not in anger, none but a fiend could be angry with you ; and, whatever you may think of me, my heart is that of a man, and a gentleman. I ask of you, therefore, as a kindness, not to place me in your thoughts in the same category with another. I ask you also to be perfectly silent with regard to all that has passed between us—to forget it, if possible. Will you promise me ?”

Readily she gave the promise, and he continued :—

“I leave you then, thinking of you as we think of a saint or an angel—above the humble joys of mere humanity. It is well, perhaps, for me that I think thus, for had I thought of you more as a mere woman, I might have found it harder to overcome the regret I feel at parting with you. Farewell, fair saint. Will you sometimes bestow a prayer on a poor worldly-minded sinner.”

As he spoke there was in his tone a strange mingling of pride and admiration, of pique and affection. Honor hardly knew how to

understand him, nor what to answer. She said :—

“I will pray for you, believe me ; and believe me, too, when I say that I am sure you would not harm me.”

“Thank you,” he said, and was gone.

CHAPTER IX.

HONOR sat down on the stump of a tree as soon as he had left her, much overcome by the scene which had passed. Here she fell into a deep reverie, not over the past alone, but over the future too, till she became almost unconscious of where she was. The faint "slumberous sound" of the evening breeze, which had just begun to rise, and which seemed to move through the trees almost without agitating them, the solitude, the deep monotony of green shadow, helped to lull her outward senses.

From this dream-like state she was suddenly startled by the tones of a harsh, querulous voice.

"What are you doing here all alone in the wood, Honor Sky?" said Mrs. Winthrop.

Honor rose respectfully.

"I have been taking a walk, madam."

"Hum," said Mrs. Winthrop, with a dry, incredulous cough. "Alone?"

In spite of herself Honor blushed, but looking her interrogator full in the face, and with an ingenuous openness, which might have convinced anyone not determined to prejudge her, she answered:—

"No, I was not alone, I have been talking with a person with whom I am slightly acquainted."

"Slightly acquainted! Pray was your acquaintance of your own sex? Did you meet by appointment?"

"My acquaintance was not of my own sex, and we did meet by appointment," cried Honor, unable to repress some of the indignation she felt.

"And you acknowledge it. I never met with such unblushing effrontery. A fit person to be entrusted with the education of youth, I always said. Upon my word, I am astonished at Mr. and Mrs. Austen. It was very different in my time; but new people, new ways. Fie, fie, Honor Sky! When

you were in *my* school, I hoped better of you."

Honor crimsoned with resentment and wounded modesty, answering with some spirit:—

"I cannot see, Mrs. Winthrop, what right you have to act as a spy on my actions, or a judge of my conduct. Remembering your kindness long, long ago, I do not wish to be disrespectful, but in justice to myself I must say, I can satisfy those to whom I am answerable, and who have authority over me. You have none."

Nothing could have affronted the jealous Mrs. Winthrop more than this speech. Her large nose coloured up, and her dull eye almost flashed, as she answered:—

"Of course I know I am nobody in the parish now, without your telling me, Miss Sky. Thank you for your gratitude in reminding me. There would not be such fine doings if I were. Young people will think they know better than old ones, and I should not wonder if the Austens countenanced you yet. It is extraordinary what people will do out of opposition. But let me tell you, Miss,

I cannot answer it to my own conscience to keep your disgraceful proceedings secret. And they have been seen by other eyes than mine, and long known to more than one person, but now I have had ocular demonstration. Yes—and have heard as well as seen. Young gentlemen don't call humble girls saints and angels for nothing."

Honor stood for a minute confounded, silenced, then she answered:—

"If you have condescended to play the eavesdropper, Mrs. Winthrop, I cannot be surprised at the construction you have put on words which were spoken with a very different meaning from what you suppose, and which were listened to by me in all innocence, and knowing as I did that I should never again meet the person who spoke them, I trust you will think better of it than to endeavour to injure an innocent girl; but I believe those whom I most love, and who know me, will not condemn me without proof."

"Insolent minx! so you brave me, do you?" cried Mrs. Winthrop, in a mixture of passion with virtuous indignation; "so, so, we shall

see. Even Mr. and Mrs. Austen will not be able to uphold you in spite of the whole parish. Good evening, Miss Sky; if you had humbled yourself, and submitted as you ought to have done, I would have concealed your shame; but now I have no hope of you ; ” and turning her back, the late vicar’s lady strode away majestically.

To tell the truth, she really did believe Honor guilty of misconduct. It was not in her nature to do otherwise. Like most persons of mean mind and shallow heart, it was far easier to her to believe evil than good. In truth, except as a rigid adherence to conventional rules, and formalities of thought and demeanour, Mrs. Winthrop had no idea of good at all. Goodness was not with her a thing of the heart, superseding all rules, and flowing from pure affections as the stream flows from the fountain ; but a thing of regulations and definitions—a strict observance of a code of action.

It was on the afternoon of the day succeeding this interview, as Frank was returning home from a long round of visits in the parish, somewhat hot and tired, he saw Mary at the

gate, advancing towards him with rather a disconsolate air.

“ Well, my best ! ” he said, speaking cheerfully, “ you have no headache, I trust, though this heat is enough to give anybody one.”

“ No, darling, I wish it were nothing worse than a headache.”

“ Worse ! Baby ! My dear, what is the matter ? ”

“ Oh, darling, baby is quite well, thank Heaven. It is about poor Honor Sky.”

Frank’s face, which had exhibited signs of relief when he heard the child was well, now fell again.

“ What has befallen her ? No harm, I trust ? ”

“ Mrs. Winthrop has just been here, and has been telling me the strangest story. It is about an hour now since she went, and I have been longing so for your return. I daresay I have walked down to the gate twenty times.”

“ Mrs. Winthrop,” cried Frank, making a wry face, “ oh, if it is only a story of hers, I should think it does not much signify. You know what a spite she has against poor Honor. But

tell me at once, dear, and don't keep me in suspense."

"Indeed I hardly know how to tell you, it has vexed me so. Do you know Mrs. Winthrop says, when she was in Dagley Wood last night, she saw Honor Sky walking with a young man who appeared to be a gentleman."

"Slanderous old—how does she know it was Honor Sky?"

"Oh! it was Honor, for she saw her afterwards."

"And who was the gentleman?"

"I don't know, neither does Mrs. Winthrop. Honor would not tell her."

"And quite right too. What had Mrs. Winthrop to do with it?"

"But she says they talked together for a long time, sometimes walking and sometimes standing still, and she heard him call her an angel."

Frank looked surprised, and a little annoyed; then he laughed.

"Well, my love, I have called you an angel before now, I think. After all, it may not be any such mighty matter. Why may

not Honor Sky have a lover as well as Mary Hurst?"

"No reason, certainly, why she should not," she said, smiling too, "that is, if it were all right. "But," and the harassed look returned, "you know what Honor suffered only last year, and it seems strange she should have another attachment, and carry it on in so clandestine a manner, more especially as the young man seems altogether in another rank of life."

"But you have only Mrs. Winthrop's authority for all this."

"But she says she met Honor and taxed her with it all, and that she could not deny having met the young man by appointment; and, moreover, she says they were seen together late the night before by another person—whose name she is not at liberty to give—in the closest conversation, and this person, for whose perfect respectability Mrs. Winthrop is ready to vouch, says she knows the man is a gentleman, and goes under a feigned name—that he knows, too, that Honor has been acquainted with him for a long time, and has gone to him at his lodgings."

“Nonsense !” cried Frank—“I don’t believe a word of the whole story. We will go down in the evening and speak to Honor about it ourselves. Depend upon it, she will explain it all to us.”

“Do you think she will? How glad I am!” cried Mary, much relieved, and feeling an implicit reliance on her husband’s opinion. She wondered now how she could have reposed so much confidence in Mrs. Winthrop’s narrative. Mary was one of those who are truly anxious to think no evil; but she had an unhappy facility for believing everything she heard, and adopting the opinions of those who were near her, unless she actually knew to the contrary, when, to do her justice, she was, though often with great pain to herself, as firm as a rock. But Mary only saw the things before her eyes; she judged of people’s actions from isolated facts, and not from any general idea of their whole character. She was not in the habit of generalising anything. It was not the nature of her mind.

She did not believe that even Mrs. Winthrop would tell a downright falsehood, and her tale, and the evidence which had supported it,

had seemed to her conclusive, pained as she was by it. But Frank, of course, must be right and she wrong. It was an immense comfort, and with a sense of the relief it afforded, she was able to eat her dinner with a tolerable appetite, and even to converse afterwards about other matters, one of which was a projected visit to her mother before the summer was over.

“Poor mamma,” said Mary, “writes as if she were very anxious indeed I should be able to come. There seems to me something more than ordinarily melancholy about her letter, and something, too, more—more—affectionate, I was going to say—that is, I don’t mean that she is not always affectionate; but, you know, she does not always show it warmly. In this letter she says she is anxious, longing to see me again, and begs I will let nothing interfere with my visit. It almost seems as if she thought I might not be able to come again. Poor mamma! I must not disappoint her. She has had so much to try her.”

“Certainly not, dear. God willing, you shall go; but I trust it is a fancy of your own

about her thinking you might not be able to come again."

"Or a fancy of hers, perhaps; but you shall read the letter. My sister Emmy says in her note that mamma cannot take such long walks or so much exertion of any kind as she used to do, and that her colour is not good, and she suffers from her breathing, but, as dear Emmy says, she must expect such things at her age, and particularly with so much to try her as mamma has had. But what touched me the most, in conjunction with mamma's own letter, is, Emmy tells me, that mamma talks constantly about me and poor Edward, and says what kind children we were to her, though, I am sure, neither of us did more than we ought to do, at least I never did; do you know, she says she should like to tell me herself she is not ungrateful."

"You shall go, dear Mary, as soon as you can possibly get ready."

"Yes, that is what I should like; but I should like to leave everything quiet and comfortable behind, particularly at the school And I should not like poor dear Honor to be worried and annoyed while I am away."

“She shall not be, I am resolved, and now, dear, that the evening is cool, we must go and hear our little friend’s solution of Mrs. Winthrop’s mystery.”

They found Honor seated in her porch, doing some needlework. It was a sweet summer evening, with cloud and sunshine intermixed. A soft breeze now swept over woods and gardens, and came laden with all sweet scents. Roses and lilies, sweet peas and mignonettes, the clematis over the porch, and the honey-suckle at the gate, made Honor’s tiny abode a very paradise of flowers.

Frank and Mary were both struck by the unpretending beauty of the cottage scene, which, the former thought, was rendered perfect by the quiet figure of Honor as she sat at work, unconscious of their approach, her thick-fringed eyelids drooping over her eyes, and her fair curls half shading her features. A more guileless face Frank Austen thought he had never seen. He did not for one moment credit Mrs Winthrop’s tale. In fact he had then nearly forgotten it. Not so Mary—her mind was anxiously balanced between hope and fear, though the former had greatly pre-

dominated ever since she had heard her husband's opinion. She had still, however, her misgivings ; Mrs. Winthrop and her friends could hardly have told downright lies, and as the moment approached for clearing up the affair, these misgivings increased.

The moral aspect of the cottage picture had not struck her as it had struck Frank. "She is so engrossed with her work, she does not hear us," whispered Mary.

She did look engrossed certainly, but was it with her work ? Her fingers sped nimbly down the long seam, but her thoughts went not with them—she had been all day much worried and vexed, but she felt she had, humanly speaking, done no wrong, and her trust in Divine Providence was firm. The Austens too, she felt certain, would believe her. She did in truth remember the affair of the aquarium, in the days of old, but Mary had not known her then, and the very result of that business must moreover have made it more impossible to doubt her, even when circumstances appeared to be against her. With regard to Mr. Austen, although he had not known her so long, and had not, from personal experience,

the same reason perhaps to trust her, strange to say, she felt more secure. She had passed, however, an anxious, agitated day, her thoughts divided between her own affairs and the strange interview she had had on the previous night. She was, at the moment the Austens arrived, revolving in her own mind the steps she ought to take—whether she ought to go at once to the Vicarage, or wait and let events take their own course. She would have preferred the former step, could she have really told the whole tale, but her promise to William Wood fettered and puzzled her. Mary's whisper, low as it was, had, however, arrested her attention, and she looked up; then laying down her work, she advanced eagerly to meet her friends, her blush of consciousness accompanied by a look of ingenuous dignity and confidence. She wondered if, after all, they had seen Mrs. Winthrop; but her doubt on this subject was set at rest by Frank's first words.

“We have come, Honor,” he said, “to express our regret that you should have been exposed to any annoyance, as we fear you have, from Mrs. Winthrop. Of course I need not assure you that the vague, confused gossip we

have heard from her has no weight with us."

Honor's face grew bright, and bright drops sprang to her eyes.

"Thank you, dear, kind friends, I know I may call you—dearest and kindest, I was sure you would do me justice. I thought I might reckon on your knowledge of me."

"I am so glad, dearest Honor," said Mary, taking her hand in her own loving way, "we came, since you can explain all to us, and then we can silence that odious woman."

"Odious woman! what a strong epithet for you, dear!" said Frank, laughing. "It does me good to hear your just indignation."

But as Mary spoke, Honor had coloured, and a shadow of embarrassment had passed over her countenance.

"I cannot explain all, dearest Mrs. Austen," she said with modest courage, "because another person is concerned, and I have given a promise; but—"

Mary's face fell with frank disappointment, and Honor, instantly noticing the change, stopped short. Frank now spoke.

"Tell us what you please then, Honor, or

what you can. Remember always we do not doubt you, but, for your own sake, because we think so highly of you, we should like to make all you do appear as correct to others as we do not doubt it is." And Frank, as he spoke, held out his hand to Honor, who took it with much emotion, saying:—

"I will tell you all I can. But first, tell me what you have heard from Mrs. Winthrop."

Frank complied with her request, taking the narrative on himself, and telling Mary to correct him if he made a mistake. When he had finished, Honor said—

"There is no falsehood in anything Mrs. Winthrop has told you, except what she reports her friend to have said. This friend, I have every reason to believe, is Mr. Carver," and Honor's lip trembled as she named him, "because I did meet him at my gate the first evening; but if it is, may God forgive him for having slandered me so basely." She stopped, almost choked, while the compassionate Mary again took her hand.

"Carver!" cried Frank; "if *he* is the person—but go on, Honor."

“I have then,” said Honor, “had two long walks with the person whom Mrs. Winthrop saw. The first arose from a meeting, accidental on my part, at least; the second was by appointment, made at the urgent request of the stranger, and agreed to by me on the condition it should be the last. What passed concerned himself chiefly, I may say entirely; but I am not at liberty to relate it. We parted with the intention of never meeting again; I had seen him two or three times before, some time ago, but always in the company of James, except once when I went to his lodgings, to—to obtain satisfaction about something relating to Mr. Carver, and in truth it was partly what passed during that interview that led to the breaking off my engagement.”

“I see it all,” said Frank, “at least, as far Mrs. Winthrop’s and Mr. Carver’s motives are concerned. What this stranger wanted with you, I cannot quite understand, of course, knowing nothing of the circumstances; but I can trust you, and if he really never returns, the world, I think, can have nothing to say either. But you must promise me never to walk with him, or to see him alone again.”

“I do promise. I will never see him again unless he permits me to tell you and Mrs. Austen all, as I wished to do now. But I do not think he will ever seek me again.”

“So much the better.”

“Did he,” asked Mary, “as Mrs. Winthrop said, call you an angel?”

Honor could not help colouring, as she answered:—

“Yes, he did; but he did not mean it as Mrs. Winthrop thought; and if he did,” she added, “you know I could not help it.”

Frank smiled again, and the Austens took leave.

“You think, dear, I suppose,” said Mary, not quite satisfied, “that Honor has been all right.”

“I would answer for Honor’s purity and goodness, Mary, as I would answer for yours; but I fear she has not acted with worldly prudence. Perhaps, however, she has acted from a higher motive, and if so, let us not blame her. I suspect Carver of mischief and revenge. Our business now is to counteract the mischief he and his mouthpiece—Mrs. Win-

throp—may do. I would not say so to Honor, but the affair is annoying."

Frank was right, the affair was annoying, and it proved even more so than he had anticipated.

Mrs. Winthrop, finding that neither Mr. nor Mrs. Austen took any notice of her communication, except that the latter wrote her a note, telling her that she and Mr. Austen had had a conversation with Miss Sky, and were perfectly satisfied, soon bruited abroad the whole affair, accompanied by inuendoes and suppositions, which were much more powerful than the facts themselves to injure the fair fame of the poor school-mistress. Neighbours began to look coldly on Honor Sky, the tradespeople at whose shops she dealt spoke to her in a disrespectful tone, and the parents of some of the children, more especially those whom she had punished or found fault with, even took them from school. Many of these latter, however, stood by her. They had begun to be conscious of the benefit she had been the means of conferring upon them, through their children. She had visited them also at their own houses, and they had formed a personal

regard for her, increased on her part by much active kindness. These would not believe anything against her.

“She had done them and theirs, and taught them and theirs, more good during the five years she had been in Thornbury, than Mrs. Winthrop had done during twenty.”

Thus, in the little school-world of Thornbury, partizanship raged high, but the more powerful party was on the side of Mrs. Winthrop, and though Honor was deeply gratified, and even surprised at the quarters from which she received attention and kindness, she was, in truth, on the whole, much cast down. To be so treated and pointed at was almost more than she could bear, and to know, as she did, that James Carver was at the bottom of all this misery, was a bitter aggravation of it. She had long thought him unprincipled; but it required the events of the present to show how petty and revengeful his mind really was.

His grand house had been ready for some time, and was said to be magnificently furnished. He had a fine carriage, too, in which he often drove out; and once

he had nearly driven over Honor in the street, she could not help thinking on purpose. Poor Honor! she was bitterly cast down, and though she had once been more utterly prostrated by distress, this seemed a yet harder trial—and all the more so that it was unaccompanied by any bodily illness. But she prayed earnestly for support, she strove to put her trust in God, and to repress the passions of anger and indignation, which often swelled her poor heart to bursting. It was a heavy additional grief, too, that the mischief did not stop with herself.

Her friends at the Vicarage were deeply involved in the blame that was thrown upon her. Everywhere Mrs. Winthrop shook her head at the mention of the Austens. She “had told Mrs. Austen the whole circumstances; Mr. Austen knew them, too, as well as she did; and yet in the face of the whole parish, they persisted in maintaining that good-for-nothing girl in a position for which she was in every way unfit. There must be something at the bottom of it,” Mrs. Winthrop would add significantly; “it cannot be altogether mere obstinacy. And to think of such a person having

the training of the young. Upon my word, it is quite scandalous. If Mr. Carver would speak out, he could tell a tale, but his disposition is generous—misplaced generosity, in this case, I call it."

If Mr. Carver did not speak out, he did, however, what was still more effective. He blasted poor Honor's character by silence when he ought to have spoken, and by looks, and hints, and protestations of not wishing to injure the poor thing. He thus secured public blame for Honor, and public praise for himself, at one stroke, and no one liked better than James Carver "to kill two birds with one stone." James Carver was a great man in Thornbury now, and much courted by the "best society" of that immaculate borough, even by those among his political opponents who had marriageable daughters. He did not openly abuse Mr. Austen, but he sought to annoy him through others, at vestries and committee-meetings, by believing and helping to circulate false reports about him and his affairs. I have said by "believing," for it was as much a part of James Carver's nature, as of Mrs. Winthrop's, to believe evil rather than good. In spite of him-

self, he felt humbled in the presence of the vicar, and he was eager to drag him down to his own level—eager to believe that he was such as himself; for no man, not even James Carver, likes to think himself worse than others. It was his creed, indeed, that no man was to be trusted; and if for a moment a misgiving would suggest itself—the least faint whispering of his better angel—he was eager to stifle it, eager to prove to himself the truth of the dreary creed, in which, strange to say, his happiness lay—that all men were utterly selfish, utterly venal, and utterly false, whenever their interest was at stake.

It of course appeared improbable to him that Mr. Austen should protect Honor out of pure philanthropy and disinterestedness. He had certain reasons too, connected with his knowledge of the affairs of William Wood, for fancying the vicar might have other motives, though what they were he could not fathom. James Carver was one of those persons who often miss people's motives from the very fact of their looking too deep for them. He could not believe that anything was what it seemed, and hence he sometimes outwitted himself.

All these reports and inuendoes, and malicious misrepresentations and suspicious facts, uncontradicted and uncontroverted by Frank, opened wide a door for his enemies to rush in upon him. All whom he had affronted by reprobating them for their open wickedness, all whom he had affronted because they supposed he did not side with them in politics, all whom he had affronted because they fancied he did side with them, but would not alienate one half of his parishioners by making a party with the other half, all who imagined he had not paid sufficient attention to them and their opinions, all who had any grudge against him, real or imaginary, came down upon him like a flood. Many, it is true, were unmoved by this malice and falsehood, and continued to believe in him, and defend him; but the wicked and malicious are generally more active in their hate, than the amiable and well-inclined in their opposition to it. And this does not present so bad a view of human nature, after all, to us as would at first appear, for we must remember that in such cases as I allude to, hate is not opposed by love, but generally by a mere abstract sense of justice and esteem,

feelings which never are nor can be so personal as hate. Passion can only be adequately opposed by passion. It is, moreover, the nature of wicked-doers to make noise and disturbance, whereas it is the nature of those who live "soberly and righteously," to live "quietly" also. Thus two or three evil-disposed persons in a parish or in a state will make more noise than a thousand of the quiet and well-disposed.

Another class there is, likewise, which, without any active malice, nay, perhaps with considerable good-nature, but too indolent to examine evil reports to the foundation, and too unsuspicious to doubt what is told in a plausible manner, often gives currency to slanderous stories by repeating them out of mere idleness. Many such people there were in Thornbury, as there are everywhere else. And so it came to pass, that all at once, after having devoted his time, his thoughts, and a great part of his small income, for so long, to the welfare of the parish he was set over, Frank Austen found himself all at once a mark for the persecution of the envious and the malicious. Even of those who continued to stand by him

and support him, some did it out of opposition, because he was *their* man. They did not, in truth, enter much into the merits of the case ; cases to them seldom had merits ; to stand by their own man was their creed, and composed their idea of social morality. But, in spite of the support of these thorough-going and discriminating friends, and that of those whose good opinion was more valuable, the disagreeables of Frank's position daily increased. First of all, the funds of the school fell off so terribly, that to support it seemed almost impossible. The suspicions which hung over the conduct of the mistress were urged by many, glad to get hold of any excuse for withholding their subscriptions, while not a few boldly maintained that these suspicions were absolute certainties, and wondered significantly "what reason the vicar could have for upholding such a person. Mr. Carver had long known what sort of a person Miss Sky was," said they, and Mr. Carver was now a great authority in Thornbury.

In truth, Honor's old companion and former lover spared no pains to ingratiate himself with the Thornbury people, and by flattering

their vanity, indulging their cupidity, and pandering to many of their worst passions, as well as by doing them some real good, he had succeeded in making himself popular among a certain class, while his eligibility as a match had made him be received by another.

Poor Frank was much cast down. It seemed hard, just as he had begun to flatter himself he had made some progress, to find himself thus thrown back. The school, too, had begun to flourish, Honor had managed it so well, and had been so much liked, and lately so successful, and now it seemed that if she continued, it might altogether fall to the ground. But Frank was resolved not to abandon her, should he resign his living, for he was firmly persuaded of her innocence. Principle as well as regard determined him not to forsake her. It was a great trial, but he felt he was right, he felt God knew his motives, and would uphold and strengthen him. Did he and Honor only remain firm in the faith that all things work together for good to those who love the Lord, he would yet, in his own time, make good his word to them. Frank Austen concealed to the utmost of his

power from Honor Sky how much he had to bear, and he strove to conceal it from Mary too. He was instinctively conscious that his wife had not of herself the same undoubting faith in Honor which he had, and he feared that in her heart she might murmur at what he suffered for the sake of the little school-mistress. Each time that Frank and Mary had a conversation on the subject, Mary remained exactly of her husband's opinion, but during the intervals a degree of doubt always seemed to gather again in her mind. Towards Honor she was invariably kind and affectionate; for, indeed, it was not in her gentle nature to be otherwise; but Honor fancied she did not always talk to her with the same confidence she used to do. A certain nameless sense of restraint appeared to pervade their intercourse, which Honor tried in vain to believe existed only in her own imagination.

CHAPTER X.

As the summer weeks passed on, things grew worse at Thornbury. Honor could not blind herself to the fact that the school fell off terribly in numbers, and when she found fault with those who remained for being idle and disobedient, they would answer with a kind of insolence which would bring the angry blood in a torrent to the face and neck of the indignant school-mistress. The first two or three times this occurred, she tried to persuade herself that it was accidental; but when at last she could do so no longer, she went to reason with the parents, and enquire why they permitted their children to behave in such a manner.

Poor Honor! The answer she received to

her inquiry made her indeed most unhappy, for she learnt not only the full extent of the stories which had been circulated about herself, but she heard also how Mr. Austen's kindness to her had operated to his disadvantage. It was on an August afternoon when Honor set out on this errand. The day had been, unlike August days in general, wet and stormy, but had cleared up a little towards sunset. The sun went down to rest in threatening grandeur, leaving behind him a wild red sky and dark masses of magnificent cloud. A quick breeze blew the great drops from the laden trees and herbage, and cleared away the clouds at present, though it promised to bring a fresh relay, the gloomy edges of which were now just visible on the far horizon. The streets streamed with water, and the trees and the roofs of the houses dripped with the previous heavy rain, while the greater pools reflected the grand crimson light, and each watery globule shone like a crystal sphere. It was altogether a strange mingling of the beautiful and the terrible—in Nature not an uncommon one, for her ever-varying face wears often at the same moment smiles and frowns.

Honor, Nature's own sensitive child and worshipper, felt strongly influenced by it. A wild, unearthly feeling seemed to take possession of her mind. The misery and indignation, which at that instant stirred her soul like a tempest, seemed to find sympathy and encouragement in the world without. She felt at that moment as if it were impossible to sit down and think calmly over the course she was to pursue. She rather longed to run into the wet woods, among the plashing rain-drops, and over the wind-swept plain, far away beyond the dark clouds themselves, to where the crimson vista seemed to open upon some world, far out of the reach of the angry, vexing, peace-destroying turmoil where her destiny now lay.

Full of such feelings, for they were too strong and passionate to be called thoughts, she ran rather than walked along the high-road which led into the country, hardly knowing whither she went, and splashing heedlessly through the pools in her way. The wild fresh breeze seemed at once to cool her burning cheeks and to strengthen her fainting heart. She tried to take a calmer view of

what she had just heard, tried to stay her own wild impulses, and be guided by what was just and right. But it was hardly time yet for her to be a judge of what this really was, and as thought was again working into excitement, she was suddenly arrested by the sound of a manly, cheerful voice, and looking up, she beheld the kindly face of Frank Austen, who was returning from snatching a breath of country air after a day's rain. His thoughts had been anxious enough, but when he saw Honor, he assumed a cheerful tone. He started, however, when he beheld the countenance she raised to his, so wild and agitated, so unlike the usually friendly, happy face of Honor Sky.

“Miss Sky ! what is the matter ? Nothing, I trust, has happened. Pray compose yourself,” he cried, as, unable any longer to control her feelings, she burst into tears.

“Oh, Mr. Austen ! you are so kind and good to me. How shall I ever thank you ? And I only bring grief on you.”

“You bring grief on me, Honor !” he cried, partly divining the cause of her agita-

tion ; “ you bring no grief on me, my poor girl. On the contrary, you have been to me as my right hand ever since I came to Thornbury. I am sorry to see you look so distressed. Tell me what vexes you, and perhaps I may be able to comfort you.”

“ Oh, Mr. Austen ! I fancy you know already ; but you are too generous to tell me. I cannot tell you quite what it is, but I have heard what people say of me, and I understand now why the school falls off, and the children are so saucy. Oh, it is very, very bitter, after my working so hard, and thinking at last I had done something. And then it made me so happy to think I had been of service to you, and I had got over my selfish sorrows, and oh, Mr. Austen, to think that I have done you so much mischief ! Ah, it is in vain to hope for anything here. Life is always a disappointment—always !”

Frank was much moved and struck. Truth to tell, the thoughts Honor had just expressed with so much passion had been not unlike some which had just been passing through his own mind ; yet, as sometimes happens, the instant he heard them uttered by

another, he felt they were not right, and a flash of the truth at once lightened home to his own conscience.

“ You must not speak thus, Honor ; it is unlike your better self. I am sure you will change your mind on reflection. You are agitated and excited now, and I do not wonder. I, too, have sometimes such thoughts. God is over all. If He disappoints us, it is to try us, to make us better instruments for His work, to put us in a better way of doing it. Let us pray for faith. Let us look to Him who died on the Cross, and whose mortal life, to a faithless eye, might at the time have seemed both a disappointment and a failure, and yet through Whom alone is all work made efficient.”

Honor was struck for the moment ; but she continued hurriedly :—

“ True, true ; I know my impatience and unbelief are wicked. I hardly quite meant what I said, yet God gives us our own understandings to be, through His word, our guides.”

“ Certainly, Honor. We must look for no mysterious and miraculous guidance.”

“ Well, then, Mr. Austen, my understanding shows me that my remaining here is detrimental to your work in this place ; that you would get on better without me ; not only you, but the work. I will not remain. I will not bring distress on you ; I will not bring obloquy on God’s work. I will go ; I will go at once.” And she began to walk on quickly. Frank laid a detaining hand on her arm.

“ Do not be so hasty, Honor ; it is not you who bring obloquy upon God’s work, but the slanderous tongues which have maligned you. It is my duty, as a minister of God’s word, and not only as your friend, to defend and protect the innocent, and, by God’s help, so I will.”

“ God bless you and reward you !—but the parish—”

“ The parish, Honor—yes, the parish, the flock over whose souls God has set me to watch ; they ought certainly to be, as you suggest, my first consideration. And so they are. I can never do my parish good, or anybody good, by committing what my conscience tells me would be an act of injustice or cruelty. No good can come of evil ; but good may

come—nay, *will* come of bearing it. It is my duty to set an example of what is right, and not yield to what is wrong. It would be easy, Honor, to suffer, if it were persecution for our religion's sake we had to endure ; but I feel, as I am sure you do, that to be accused of what all men consider evil, to have injurious motives imputed to one, when one is, humanly speaking, conscious that our own have been pure and self-denying, does seem very, very hard. We must, as I said before, steadily looking beyond secondary causes, fix our regard on Him alone, without whose permission no trial could reach us. We must regard our present persecution as not less a martyrdom than if it were for the Gospel's sake ; it is for conscience' sake, and all righteousness and truth are with God one and inseparable. And as for you, Honor, you must not leave us. In God's good time all will be made clear, and then you would grieve that you had deserted a post which we might not be able to get any one as fitted to fill. Let us learn to possess our souls in patience, and then all this will not have happened in vain."

Honor listened attentively—eagerly ; and,

as she listened, she became more calm. The passion of her indignation, and her outraged sense of rectitude and propriety, died away beneath the comforting words of her pastor and friend. The mists were swept away from her soul, and she began to see her position and her duties with clearer eyes. But she did not speak, for other and different emotions swelled her heart, and choked her utterance. Full to bursting was her bosom of feelings of gratitude to Frank, repentance for what she now deemed her own selfish anger, and a resolution to suffer all things, and work on with an enduring courage. Honor knew it not, but at that moment—peasant-born, humble mistress of a charity-school though she was—her aspirations, her struggles, were the aspirations and struggles of true heroism. Hers was that true nobility of nature which, thank Heaven! (I speak solemnly) is of all classes. She had turned back with Frank, and they were now walking towards Thornbury.

The wild red light had faded in the western sky. Closer and denser the cloudy curtain was drawn over the heavens, while the gathering gloom of night began to add to the deep-

ening darkness. The vanished glow of sunset had left the dripping woods and the standing pools all of one sombre, watery hue, and the wind blew more chilly and damp. The restless warmth of Honor's body and mind was now gone ; she shivered slightly with the raw, chill breeze, and, for the moment, it seemed to her as if the deep uniformity of gloom which all around enveloped her, typified the destiny with which she struggled. But she rejected, or rather she carried out, the idea.

“It is the night now,” she said to herself, “but morning and sunshine are coming again ; but when the sun does shine, he changes all these chilly drops into sparkling gems.”

When Honor bade Frank “Good night” at the entrance of the town, there was a tear in her eye, and her face glowed with gratitude and confidence.

“She is innocent and good,” said Frank to himself, as he walked homewards, “or I will never more put faith in human nature.”

Frank’s stroll, and his conversation with Honor, had done him almost as much good as it had done her. He had spoken, perhaps,

with a view to strengthen himself as well as her, and he had succeeded.

But however much courage Frank Austen and Honor Sky had gained, they soon found it was not more than they needed.

Only a few days after the interview I have described above, Frank Austen had a letter from Mr. Mauleverer, to inform him that, from various quarters, he had received communications complaining of his school-mistress, and containing very serious charges against her character and conduct. He had also heard that the school had fallen very much off in consequence; that he was very unwilling to use any harsh means, but the duties of his office compelled him not to permit such charges to pass by unheeded. He suggested that as, from what he heard, there seemed to be no doubt of the girl's imprudence at least, it might be better for her to resign the situation at once, when, without more ado, a successor could be appointed, and the whole matter might be hushed up.

Mr. Mauleverer, to do him justice, did not, it seemed, write with any ill-will or any sinister motive; for though, in some respects, a

rather weak-minded man, and subject to variations of humour, he was by no means a malicious one, or wanting in sense in ordinary cases. In the present instance, he was evidently actuated by a friendly and peaceable motive.

Nevertheless, Frank was much worried by his letter. Though he could not blame him, feeling that, situated as he was, he could not conscientiously act otherwise, he saw heavy trial, and perhaps disgrace, impending for poor Honor. He read the letter aloud to Mary. Her countenance brightened as he went on.

“ It really seems, don’t you think, dearest, a nice, sensible letter ? Surely it would be better for all parties if Honor were to take Mr. Mauleverer’s advice.”

“ I cannot think so, dear Mary. She must, of course, judge for herself ; but I shall recommend her to submit to any inquiry rather than tacitly yield up her character in this way. I tell you, dearest, I expect great things from Honor Sky—great things for education, not only in Thornbury, but perhaps for the country in general, through what she may effect when she gains age and experience ; and

that she may do this, the breath of blame must not rest upon her. And, after all, what does anyone know, or can anyone say, against her, except that she has, on two occasions, been seen walking with a young man ? Surely there is no great harm in that. The only circumstance in the least suspicious is that she will not tell what conversation passed between them on these occasions ; and, after all, what right has anyone to ask ? ”

“ But you forget, dear, people say a great deal more than this, and hint that many things could be proved.”

“ So much the more reason that there should be some official enquiry.”

“ You know best, dearest, I have no doubt,” said Mary, with a sigh. “ Poor, dear Honor ! I am heartily sorry for her. Do you think, dearest, I should go to mamma the day after to-morrow, or remain till after this enquiry, or whatever it is to be ? ”

Frank mused for an instant ere he replied.

“ I think you had better go. It would not do to disappoint your mamma again, and I shall be here to support Honor.”

Mary felt relieved that such was her

husband's opinion. She dreaded the bustle and fuss of the enquiry, and seeing so many strangers, while her terror of Mrs. Winthrop, and her clique, had become uncontrollable. Her tender heart, however, reproached her the instant after for the emotion of gladness she could not have repressed.

"If I can be of any good to poor Honor, I will stay, that is, if mamma is not worse."

"I think, darling, on all accounts, you had better go," said Frank, decidedly, and Mary left the room quite happy, for her husband's opinion was not only her opinion, but her conscience. Frank then went to Honor to communicate to her the contents of Mr. Mauleverer's letter, and to consult with her as to how it would be best to act.

This was a new and heavy blow for poor Honor; but she soon saw the whole matter as Frank did, and agreed that the only way was to demand a strict enquiry into her conduct, and to be brought face to face with her accusers. Frank, in her presence, wrote a letter to Mr. Mauleverer to this effect, adding that Miss Sky had come to the determina-

tion, if this was refused her, to take legal measures to right herself; but that she would very much prefer a private enquiry, conducted in any way that Mr. Mauleverer and himself should deem best, to the publicity of a legal trial.

An answer was ere long received from the inspector. He regretted Honor's decision; but agreed to comply with it, inviting Mr. Austen to a conference, that they might make together the necessary arrangements.

And now Honor strove to brace and nerve herself for the coming trial, by recalling and repeating to herself the arguments Frank had used on the memorable night of their walk together. Often she felt, if not hopeful, yet strong and determined. But, occasionally, hope and strength seemed to fail her, and during her lonely evenings she could not help sometimes yielding to despondency and weeping. Mrs. Austen, too, was gone to visit her mother, and though Honor had been conscious all along that Mary did not enter into, and sympathise with, her feelings and position as her husband did, still she missed her gentle company and her affectionate

kindness, which showed itself in a thousand little friendly acts. The solitude of her existence after school-hours were over become, at times, almost insupportable. Her anxiety was often so great, that to carry it all within the bounds of her heart seemed as if it would break it. Now and then Frank came to see her, and his visits were a treat and a consolation. She could unburthen her mind to him of her fears and anxieties—fears and anxieties which he shared to a great extent, not only on her account, but his own. He felt that if matters went against her, it would place him in a very uncomfortable position, as, in such a case, whatever his own convictions might be, he must part with her. He had not told her so, and, in truth, could not bring himself to tell her, trusting such a step might be unnecessary.

As the eventful period drew nearer, Frank came more frequently. He did not fancy there could have been any harm in such a step—their relative positions appeared to make it quite natural, and so pure in mind was Frank Austen, so conscious of a deportment free from blame, and so confident in his position as

a clergyman, that it had never once crossed his imagination that minds could be found sufficiently evil to see anything wrong in such a course of action. But old as he was now, Frank Austen did not know the world. He was one of those persons who are long in knowing it, from the simple fact that they have nothing very like it in themselves. His enemies now looked unutterable things while they said—

“They could never understand why the vicar had stood up so for Honor Sky, when it was so contrary to his own interest.” Some people, by the way, never can see or believe why anybody does anything contrary to their own interest. It is opposed to their theory of human nature. “But they suspected now what it was. Mr. Austen had gone much oftener to the school-house since poor Mrs. Austen left.”

Mr. Grimsby shook his solemn head.

“He never thought, from his first interview with Mr. Austen, that *he* was the man for Thornbury. See what new-fangled ideas bring people to! He had no faith in anybody that did not stand by their friends through

summation. For this he toiled early and late, for this he burrowed like a mole beneath the surface of society, making his way silently, though he could not avoid occasionally throwing up little earth-mounds, which served to indicate the direction of his occult path. Some of the constituents he flattered by talking of himself as sprung from their class, and therefore more likely to attend to the interests of their class; to others, he made personal promises of advancement, contingent on his own success, and some he won merely by magnifying to them his own grandeur and consequence, present and prospective, and then enlisting their vanity on his side by a show of confidence and friendship. Now, he had a strong, although most mistaken, conviction, that he should find in Frank Austen the chief obstacle to success. He did not believe in the reality of his neutrality, for he could not see that it was for his interest, and he had an uncomfortable feeling that Frank, who was certainly cleverer than the Thornbury people in general, penetrated his feelings, and was not so ignorant of his manœuvres as he appeared. In all this, however, he was mistaken, for though Frank,

from what he knew of his character, would not on any account have been the means of helping to make him a legislator, nominally on the same side of politics though they were, his neutrality was real, and he was utterly ignorant of the aim of James Carver, though he could not help now and then suspecting that, as far as he was himself concerned, Honor's old companion and former lover was no better than a snake in the grass.

It wanted only a few days now to the time appointed by Mr. Mauleverer for the private examination into the charges which had been preferred against Honor Sky. Her trepidation began to be extreme. She could neither eat nor sleep, and her countenance became pale, thin, and anxious. Frank Austen beheld her with sincere sympathy and pity. He could not avoid knowing how useful his company was to her, and it was a solace to himself to stroll alone occasionally in the evening to the cottage of the little school-mistress, and as the inspector's visit drew near he went more frequently. It was on a mild, pleasant evening in the end of August, that he wended his way thither as usual. The days were much shorter

now, but still hot and summer-like. This had been a very warm one, and the approach of the cool evening shadows was pleasant to Frank. There was no breeze, hardly even any air, and they stole imperceptibly over the fading landscape. The hops were picked and the corn was carried, for it had been an early season, and there was no rural sound in the fields, or song of birds in the groves, to disturb the perfect stillness. To avoid the streets, Frank had taken a round-about way to the school by a path through the fields. The soft calm of nature fell upon his mind with soothing influence. He had not felt in so harmonious a frame of mind since Mary went away.

He entered Honor's little garden with a cordial, cheerful smile on his countenance, but he did not see her, as usual, sitting in the porch. The door even was shut, and he had to knock to obtain admission. She obeyed the summons, but not immediately, and even by the uncertain light he could see that her face was weary and pallid, and her eyes red with weeping. She held out her hand, with a countenance which brightened for a moment,

but she kept the door ajar, as if she did not expect or wish him to come in.

“What is the matter, Honor, my poor girl? You must keep up your heart a little better. All will—all *must* go well.”

But Honor’s only answer was a burst of tears, which seemed, in spite of strenuous efforts on her part to prevent them, to break from her very heart, while the attempt to speak almost suffocated her. Frank beheld her in consternation.

“Has any fresh misfortune occurred?” he cried. “Let me come in, Honor, and we will talk it over.” And as he said so, he would have passed her, but she still stood right in the entrance.

“No, no!” she cried, at last, “you must not come in. They deprive me even of my only friend. You don’t know—you can’t guess how wicked they are. Oh, it is cruel—cruel and bitter!”

“Here is some mistake, Honor. It is beyond their power to deprive you of your friend.”

“Oh, no, it isn’t—you don’t understand—you are too good to understand! But you must not come here any more.”

And Honor stopped, for the crimson tide of modesty covered simultaneously her countenance and that of her auditor with a glow of momentary misery.

But Frank recovered himself quickly, and as quickly mastered a strong inclination he felt to rush furiously into the town, and kick and cudgel a number of persons unknown. He looked full and firmly in Honor's face, and his glance gave her comfort and courage.

"I came here to do you good," he said, "and not to do you harm. I will not come in now, knowing that I leave you a better Comforter. Nor will you forget, Honor, who bore obloquy for us. Remember always, 'whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth.' Farewell for the present. You will see me again on Wednesday. In the meantime, may God bless you and strengthen you ! "

He had turned to go, when a messenger arrived in breathless haste with a telegraphic despatch, which had just arrived at the Vicarage. Frank tore it open with eager, trembling hands, dreading some fresh misfortune, and, for the instant, Honor forgot the

coarse scandal which had so outraged her feelings.

“Mrs. Austen!” she cried, eagerly.

“Is well, I thank God!” her husband cried, in a tone of relief; and then he added, gravely, “but her poor mother is on her death-bed, and earnestly desires to see me. I must set off instantly, or I may be too late; but, Honor, if within the bounds of possibility, I shall be here on Wednesday morning, if I should take time neither to eat nor sleep between that time and the present.”

While Frank had been speaking, as if not to lose a moment, he had walked down the short and narrow path which led to the gate, and Honor had followed him eager to hear what he was saying. At the gate was a little knot of idlers, who had been attracted thither in pursuit of the messenger who had brought the telegram, and who, they knew, had come from the Vicarage—their curiosity, at present, being much alive to any intercourse between that place and the school-house.

“Yes, yes,” cried a slatternly, half-drunken woman, “he was sure to find un there; and

see ! she even come with un to the gate !
Shameless slut ! ”

Honor shrank back in terror ; then, remembering her own dignity, she came boldly forward, and, with wonderful self-command, which Frank could not help admiring, she said, ingenuously :—

“ Good bye, Mr. Austen. Give my love and duty to Mrs. Austen. I trust you will be in time to see Mrs. Hurst.”

“ Good bye, Honor,” he said. “ If it is possible, you may rely on me on Wednesday ; but God will befriend you ! ”

As he spoke, the same drunken slut again was heard to murmur something like a repetition of her former words. Frank turned to her.

“ Silence, woman ! ” he said, sternly ; “ nor dare to judge another by yourself.”

The woman shrank back abashed, and the knot of listeners dispersed. Although composed of the very lowest and most degraded part of the community, there was something in the solemnity of Frank’s manner, and the innocent dignity of Honor’s, which impressed even them—they knew not why. One or two

of them, as they went, curtsied to Frank, saying:—

“No offence, sir, I hope.”

It would be difficult to describe the state of Honor's mind when she found herself once more alone. She went into her little bedroom, and sat down at the window. It was dusk now—almost dark, and the night was moonless. A soft, warm mist had stolen over the heavens, and only here and there a star was visible. The church on the knoll, and the dark surrounding trees, were just discernible. Honor leant her head on the window-sill to catch the cool breath of night. The graveyard was silent as those who slept beneath its turf mounds. Honor longed at that moment to be with them. It seemed to her that she should like the dewy grass to rest over her fevered head, and the sod to press on the weary, beating heart, so that it might be still for ever. And then she recalled Frank Austen's parting words—nay, the words he had spoken to her long ago, when she was but a little child—and she remembered, too, the strength they had given her in that trial of

olden days at Derringham, when she had appealed from Miss Wormsley to Mr. St. John.

Her situation now seemed a strange counterpart of her situation then, and the recollection of the issue of that affair gave her comfort and hope. Mr. Mauleverer, however, she remembered, with misgiving, was not Mr. St. John. But Frank had said that Mr. Mauleverer was not harshly inclined. And Frank was right. Mr. Mauleverer was not really a harsh man. He was only a vain, self-sufficient one, who was inclined to be jealous of those who were prosperous without his help, but who was equally inclined to befriend the unfortunate. He was one of those, in short, who are always more kindly disposed to their fellow-creatures in adversity than in prosperity ; why, I leave the ingenious and philosophical reader to discover.

And Honor Sky recollected, too, that the issue of this affair did not depend on Mr. Mauleverer or Mr. St. John, but on Him in whose hand are the issues of all events, and with this thought she took heart once more, and kneeling at the open

window, with her eyes yet fixed on the church and the stars—a solitary star looking down on her now tranquil face, she prayed.

CHAPTER XI.

FRANK AUSTEN travelled as fast as the train and a pair of horses would carry him, for Mrs. Hurst's present residence was at some distance from a station. But fast as he went, it was long past midnight ere he arrived. Mary's mother lived in the suburbs of a small quiet cathedral town, towards which a railway is now only in progress. At that time it had not even been spoken of.

It was a small, old-fashioned, genteel house, and was separated from the road by a high wall, with large folding wooden gates, swung to moss-grown piers, and having within a thick screen of old elm-trees, still further to guard the inmates from the prying eyes of the profane vulgar. There was but a short carriage-

sweep to the house, the door of which was approached by a high flight of steps, and straight in front of it was an oval grass-plat, having in the centre an oval flower-bed, round which carriages were meant to turn. The house looked old, and was built of grey stone, having a steep roof, and narrow windows, with stone mullions. The grounds were very confined, consisting merely of a long, narrow slip of garden behind, and a paddock on one side. In the brightest of summer days, it was a gloomy place. To-night, beneath the vague light of stars, it looked funereal. But Frank Austen yet saw lights gleaming from window to window, and guessed that he had come in time.

He was met in the hall by Mary, looking pale and weary, but rejoiced and relieved to see him. She threw herself into his arms, and for a few seconds wept silently. Then she spoke in a hushed whisper, as she drew him into the dining-room, and poured him out a glass of wine.

“Mamma has rallied a little, but the doctor gives not the slightest hope. And oh, Frank, darling, she is so unhappy, because she

has not seen William. She says she has not behaved well to him, but you know that is nonsense, because she always loved *him*—that is, she was a fond mother to us all, but he was the eldest and cleverest, and the handsomest, and she was so proud of him. Poor mamma! And now she has found out, I am sure I don't know how, that he is quite reformed, and has bought back Derringham again, and she says she has thought for months that he could come back to her, and be her darling again, and that the disappointment has hastened her end. But she says it is all her own fault, and that she has not been what she ought to have been to any of us, though I am sure there could not have been a better mother, and I tell her so, and she says I am very good, and that she loves me, and she opens her whole heart to me—and oh, what a fond heart she has! I have never loved her as I ought to have done, and now I am losing her." And poor Mary wept and then sobbed, "Oh, if William would only come."

"Send for him. He cannot be such a monster as to refuse to come at such a time, I will go myself and fetch him."

"I *have* sent, dearest. I thought it right, but I was not quite sure, and I feared you might be displeased. Oh, I am so glad you approve, and that you think he will come. Surely he *must*, but none of us know William. There is no telegraph to Derringham. I will tell you what I said in my note. 'My dear brother,—Our beloved mother is dying, and says she cannot die happy till she has given you her forgiveness. Come instantly, if you wish to see her. She does not know I have written, as if you were to refuse to come, it would make her death too bitter.—Your affectionate sister, Mary Austen.' Is it all right?"

And Mary was made happy by her husband's entire approbation. He then found that a special messenger had been dispatched with the note, a little before the telegram had been sent to him, and that, as the distance was much shorter to Derringham than to Thornbury, Mr. Hurst might arrive by the dawn of day—that is, if he were at home when his sister's missive should arrive, and if he were inclined to obey the summons it contained. And this Frank Austen would not doubt, in spite of his wife's fears.

She now led him to the chamber where Mrs. Hurst lay dying. It was a large, low, old-fashioned room, containing a bed with crimson moreen curtains, beneath the spotless linen which covered it, lying the shrunken form of the dying woman. Two bright, youthful girls sat on one side, holding each other's hands, and trying not to weep. The feeble light of one candle shone on their tearful faces, but was shaded so as not to rest on that of their mother. One of the girls put her finger on her lips as Mary and her husband appeared in the doorway. They stopped, and she glided noiselessly beside them.

"I think she is asleep," she said; then answering a look in Frank's face, she continued, "Oh, I am sure she is still living, and the doctor thought she would live till the morning. If you two have anything to say, you can go into the dressing-room, and I will call you the instant she stirs."

As she spoke, with another glance at the bed, on which lay the hardly sensible form, Frank drew his wife away. The dressing-room had a door which communicated with the

bed-room, and they sat down there together in the starlight. But though their hearts were full, though they had not met for some time, though they dearly loved each other, they mutually felt that they could not speak. So, like the weeping girls in the next apartment, they could only hold each other's hand, and in breathless suspense look out from the narrow casement on the tops of the dark trees, beneath the deep sky and the solemn stars.

“Would the son come before the mother died?” thought Frank. “Would he come at all?” thought Mary, with a bursting heart.

But it is impossible to sit long, with night and silence around, and not feel the most restless emotions, the eagerest anxieties soothed into stillness. As the minutes and even hours slid stealthily by, Frank and Mary, though they did not sleep, fell both into a deep reverie. The present, with all its awfulness, and the future, to the very portal of which it had conducted them, were not forgotten for an instant, but insensibly the imagination of both was filled with scenes from the past—that

past which was even now more irrevocably separating itself from the present by a tangible and impenetrable barrier. Derringham Hall, and the scenes of his early youth there, came one by one before the memory of Frank—the red sunset evening on which he had first seen Mary, Edward's slender figure and friendly voice, the broad lawn, the oval window, the moonlight nights—the wild passion of his heart—the awe he had felt for Mrs. Hurst as the arbiter of his fate, were all so vividly present with him now, as almost to contend with the present in the sense of reality they presented. It appeared almost impossible to believe that the strong-minded and resolute woman, whose decrees had seemed so formidable, had power no longer to daunt or check—that that robust and healthy form lay close at hand, feeble and dying—helpless as an infant—waiting the Invincible Decree to which the mightiest of mortals must bend.

Mary's thoughts were of a later past—of the time she had spent in that very house—the long years of gloom and tediousness, and weary, weary waiting—then of the day when Frank came at last and they were married,

and the perfect happiness and peace she had expected in the shelter of his love and strength, and how trials had succeeded, and bodily sickness and heart-sicknesses, and anxieties and depressions and sorrows, and how, yes, when she compared the present with the past, how, in spite of them still, she was happy, and not only in spite of them, but even partly in consequence of them. And her beautiful eyes, as they rested on the outline of the thoughtful face so dear to her, shone bright as the stars, with a solemn lustre, and amid all the grief of the moment, she could thank God.

But a faint rustling sound in the next room made them both start simultaneously. Emily put her head in at the door, which had been purposely left with the lock unfastened.

“I think she is awake.”

Mary’s foot was across the threshold, and Frank was treading softly behind her, when suddenly she felt his hand on her shoulder with a strong, restraining clasp, and he drew her back.

“Hush!” he said, “I think I hear the sound of wheels.”

Mary’s heart seemed to stop beating, and

her husband held her tight, lest she should fall. In the dim candlelight, a ray of which fell on Emily's face in the doorway, she too became deadly pale. They all three held their breath to listen. They were anxious to ascertain if the faint distant sound they heard were a real sound, or the mere creation of their own eager and excited senses.

"It *is* wheels," said Frank, in a low tone, so low that none but these two could have heard it.

"But may they not be—" began Emily.

"Hardly any one else at such an hour."

There could be no doubt now that it was the sound of wheels. Nearer and nearer they came every instant. A faint, thick voice was heard now.

"Did some one say my Mary's husband had come?" And Frank and Mary, in that very moment of great suspense, had to obey the summons, for who knew that even they might not be too late if they tarried but an instant? By the side of the bed Frank stooped down over the worn face and kissed it, while he took the hand which seemed even already to be growing cold.

“Kiss me—all. Stand—where I can see you, my children ! ”

They obeyed her. The four stood in a row. She opened her eyes and tried to look at them, but the shadows of death were fast gathering over their brightness.

“May God, the father of our Lord Jesus Christ, bless—” Then she stopped; some thought of bitter anguish appeared to strike her; she murmured, “Oh God, give me obedience—Thy will is just and holy—my children here, my husband, my Edward *there*, soon—all but one. Be merciful to me, a miserable sinner ! ”

Wheels were now heard on the gravel. A carriage dashed frantically up to the door, which seemed burst open with violent haste; yet the dying woman appeared to hear nothing. Her lips yet moved; but her senses seemed to have closed on the outer world.

“Too late ! ” whispered Mary, in a voice of anguish, and the faces of her husband and sister seemed to reflect the sorrow of hers. But now a wild, eager, flurried tread on the stairs ! The dying woman seemed to catch it, seemed to listen at last.

“Who?” she asked. “Who? oh, my God! It is—”

The door was thrown open. A tall, travel-stained man, with wild dark eyes, and face pale and terror-stricken, burst into the room, and threw himself on his knees by the bedside, with his face buried on the bed-clothes.

“Mother, mother—forgive—oh mother!”

But no answer came. He started to his feet, and gazed round in mute despair.

“She is dead! Oh, mother, one look!”

The parting spirit heard that cry of mortal anguish, the only earthly sound, perhaps, that it would have heard. The mother’s dying eyes slowly unclosed, but they were faded and filmy. She appeared to make a strong but vain effort to see the face she most loved, and a mournful shadow passed over her own, which was, however, serene with death. But faintly she murmured, and human love and joy were yet in the full tone:

“My son, *my* son!”

And William Hurst folded his dying mother in a fast, yet soft, embrace, and tears of love, and grief, and remorse rained hot upon

her death-chilled face. The other four drew back and stood together, full of awe, behind the curtain. None knew how long that strange time lasted. When at last William Hurst laid down gently and reverently the wasted form he had held so fervently, they all knew it was but the earthly part, and that the mortal had put on immortality.

Then he stood upright and remembered that the only being who loved him had left him for ever, and that he was alone in the presence of his alienated family—the family whom he had ruined and disgraced. William Hurst was a man of a proud and haughty spirit; he had hitherto said to himself that he was more sinned against than sinning; but the scene amid which he was now placed appeared, for the moment at least, to give him a new view. From the dark abyss of death often flashes the light which manifests the true realities of life.

The two young sisters looked fearfully on the striking figure and disturbed countenance of their almost unknown brother, whom they could just remember having seen in their childhood, and whose existence and history

had been to them so long but a dread mystery. Nothing short of the presence of this, to them, alarming and half-mythical being, could have diverted their minds for one moment from the fact that their mother lay dead before them.

William Hurst, as I have said, stood with his arms folded gazing on the dead. Yet, even amid all the returning tide of tenderness and remorse which swept violently over his soul, never had he felt in his whole life before the awkwardness he did at that instant, nor the yearning for family sympathy and family affection.

Mary, as well as her sisters, had drawn slightly back. They feared to intrude on his sorrow, or to meet with a repulse. He had marked the movement, slight as it was, and mistook entirely its motive. He thought his sisters shrank from him. A shadow came over his countenance, and a bitter feeling to his heart. But Frank Austen guessed his mood more correctly ; and he whispered low in his wife's ear :—

“ Comfort him, for he is much afflicted.”

She approached him somewhat timidly, yet with much tenderness.

“ Brother William,” she said, and stopped suddenly as she burst into tears.

William turned towards her. There was a lightening spark of joy in his dark eye.

“ Mary ! sisters !” he said with a trembling lip. “ *She* forgave me. Can you ? ”

The weeping girls could not speak, but following the example of their elder sister, they clung round their restored brother, and wept.

And then, as he returned their caresses, and held them tight, as if he feared he should lose them again, the proud man too lifted up his voice and wept.

And Frank Austen noiselessly slipped from the room, and left the re-united children alone with their dead mother.

Frank Austen was much agitated. On leaving the chamber of death, he had gone to the drawing-room, which looked cold and deserted, as if it had not been inhabited for many days. Here he walked up and down in the ghostly starlight, thinking over the past scene, considering his own line of conduct,

and how he might best minister to the wants of the minds around him, so as to comfort, elevate, and strengthen them, while serving the God and Saviour whose servant he was.

And then his mind wandered away to the spirit-world, and to wonderings and speculations intense on the mysteries which that state should reveal, and then he leant his arms on the window-frame, and looking out on the stars, repeated to himself:—

“ Who could have thought such darkness lay concealed
Within thy beams, O sun ? or who could find,
Whilst fly, and leaf, and insect stood revealed,
That to such countless orbs thou mad’st us blind ?
Why do we then shun death with anxious strife ?
If light can thus deceive, wherefore not life ? ”

Beautiful lines ! yet sad to think of the cloud which in later days obscured the faith of the writer. The history of Blanco White is a fearful example of the rebound which, in certain minds, may take place from superstition to infidelity. The ball is raised from the mire in which it has hitherto been buried, and thrown upwards to the heaven of faith, only to fall down again into a more hopeless slough of despond.

The window on which Frank leant looked eastward, and as he gazed, faint streaks of light appeared on the horizon—the dawn of another day, and then he thought of her on whom that day dawned in another world, and of the Eternal Day which shall at last dawn for all those who love the Lord, and wait for his appearing.

And so he mused till he remembered with a sudden start that this was Wednesday—the day of trial for poor Honor Sky.

Strange it seemed to be called back from the lofty contemplations in which he had been engaged, to the worry and the littleness of mundane affairs ; to the jealousies, the meanness, the falsehoods, the strifes in which immortal creatures waste the precious time which God has given them for the highest purposes, and crush for ever the hopes of others, as well as their own.

Frank Austen, it is true, had no such mad infatuation to reproach himself with ; but his own anxieties, and fears, and irritations, and wishes appeared to himself then childish and faithless. He wished Honor Sky had been with him then, as he thought she, too, would

have been strengthened. But she was not, and it was his bounden duty to go to her. Her fair fame, her influence, her usefulness must not be sacrificed through selfish negligence on his part. He took out his watch, which he could now just see by the growing daylight, and was much chagrined to perceive that ere it was possible for him to reach the station, the first train would be gone. But there was another in two hours, and if he started in one, he should be in time for that—in time, too, he trusted, to do something for poor Honor. Losing not a moment, he despatched a servant at once to order a Fly.

In the meantime he knew not well what to do. He felt that he must see Mary ere he started, yet he was unwilling to disturb that sacred family re-union by the presence of one who might, by the returned prodigal, be deemed an interloper. While his thoughts were yet occupied by this little difficulty, he felt a soft arm steal round him, and a tearful cheek was laid against his.

Having kissed poor Mary tenderly, he told her gently of the duty which lay before him, and prayed her to excuse his leaving her at

such a time. She made no objection. She never did to anything her husband thought a duty, however painful to herself. She only answered :—

“Come to William first. He wishes to know you. Ah, I understand now how *she* loved him so. You can do him good, my Frank, for he is not altogether like you and poor Edward, though he has such a feeling heart. Come to him, dearest, and explain to him why you must leave us now. But you will soon come back.”

CHAPTER XII.

THE eventful day dawned. It may be believed poor Honor had never closed her eyes all night; but she had refrained from tears. Her countenance was pale but composed, and though both her voice and her limbs trembled, her heart was wonderfully tranquil. The chief anxiety which agitated it was for the return of Frank Austen. She rose and dressed by dawn of day, and, after drinking a cup of tea, sat down alone to the dreary occupation of waiting. The weather, which had been fine during the night, changed soon after day-break.

It was a cheerless morning, warm, and wet, and stormy, not a break in the dark, lowering sky, and the rain descending in one steady and continuous, though gentle, fall. Honor's

window was open, and she listened to its low, monotonous sound. A strange feeling of the contrast between the still scene before her now, and the stirring anxious one in which she was so soon to be engaged, came over her, and then she thought perhaps that was the last time she should ever sit in that room as her own, and, strange to say, at that instant she contemplated such a conclusion, not with dismay, but with a gentle melancholy. Never more strongly than at that moment had she felt a sense of reliance on Divine Providence. As she sat, a sound—the sound of a footstep broke upon her ear. Her heart gave one wild throb of expectation. It must be Frank Austen, and yet she fancied he would rather have sent than come himself. Probably it was his messenger. She ran eagerly to open the door ; but stopped short in disappointment when she saw that the new-comer was not Frank Austen, but another gentleman.

She did not recognise him at first, as he wore a large, shiny water-proof overcoat, and carried an umbrella over his face.

“ Miss Sky ! ” he said, and lowering his umbrella, she saw that it was Mr. Mauleverer him-

self, and bending his stately form, he entered beneath Honor's literally lowly roof. Here he divested himself of his wet hat and his streaming waterproof, and then the dignified Mr. Mauleverer was himself again. "This is a sad affair, Miss Sky!" he said, loftily, but not unkindly, "and I have called to see you alone about it privately, before we proceed to the formal enquiry. I thought," he continued, with increasing patronage, "if you would tell me all about it, I could be of service to you. You are aware, of course, that I am the person on whom your fate depends."

"Thank you, sir, for your kindness. You will do me justice—I—I," Honor said, taking heart a little.

"Of course, my good girl. Dear me! how pale and thin you are! I have heard all the story from Mr. Austen—worrying business—he has confided to me, of course, all the particulars, and consulted me all about it. Excellent sensible man, Mr. Austen, and improves so much on acquaintance. Now, Miss Sky," here Mr. Mauleverer spoke the truth, and for the minute forgetting his personal consequence, he spoke like an unaffected and well-disposed

man, as he was in the main, when his brain was not obfuscated, nor his temper irritated by the fumes of conceit, "I think, from all I have heard, you are innocent of all but imprudence, and a little—we will say a little flirting perhaps, a crime which nobody but sour old women and disappointed lovers would be very severe on—for once—I say for once. We must not have such a thing again."

"Sir!" began Honor, colouring.

He waved his hand.

"You need not speak. I understand it all. Now tell me the whole affair. Make me your friend, and I can bring you through—that is, if you are really innocent; and I do believe you are."

"Oh, thank you, sir, for that word—thank you, heartily! I will tell you all—everything I have told Mr. and Mrs. Austen. It grieves me to think, sir, that I have been the means of bringing them into trouble."

"We clergymen are accustomed to that in the discharge of our duty. You are right to be grateful. It is a refreshment to us to meet with grateful people, and they are not com-

mon. I got up early this morning, and came off by an early train in order to have this conversation with you."

"Thank you!" cried Honor, again feeling grateful for his kindness, but feeling she should have been more so, had her gratitude been less ostentatiously claimed.

"And now, my good girl," he continued, "lose no time, and let me hear all your story—where you first met this young man, how long you have known him, who he is, why you were so foolish as to make an appointment with him, what passed between you on that occasion, and if you have ever seen him since, what he is, and where he lives?"

"Of him I can tell you nothing, and I know only what he has told me himself. Mr. Carver, who is, I believe, to be one of the examiners to-day, has known him longer, and knows him much better than I do. I have seen him several times in his company—once at his own lodgings, once in Dagley Wood by accident, and once by appointment. I have no wish to see him again, and most probably never shall. With regard to what passed between us, I promised to keep it secret, and I

cannot tell it. Had I known what it was to cost me, I should not have promised."

Mr. Mauleverer frowned, and looked sterner.

"I cannot see that you are bound by a promise to do wrong. Why not obtain a release from your promise?"

"I do not know where to find the gentleman. Would that I knew!—but it is too late now."

"You do not even know where he lives? This is very extraordinary. There is too much mystery here, Sky; and, I tell you candidly, I do not like it. There could be no harm in your telling me the circumstances. You have told Mr. Austen."

"Indeed, I have not told him, sir, anything I promised to conceal. I will tell you all he knows."

Mr. Mauleverer's countenance cleared up. He did not like anyone to be before himself even in the confidence of a village-girl; and, to tell the truth, he really wished to befriend Honor. He had come with the intention of being patronising and friendly, and it would have disappointed his good feelings, as well as his weaknesses, to have been prevented being so. He listened while Honor related

the outline of the history of her engagement to James Carver, told how she had met Mr. Wood with him, that her marriage had been broken off, and that Mr. Wood had sought a conversation with her afterwards.

Mr. Mauleverer was interested. He said, with some little warmth, but without much delicacy, which appeared to be a quality unknown to him :—

“And this fellow has really accepted the office of being one of your examiners, after jilting you.”

Honor colored up to the eyes.

“You mistake,” she cried. “He did not jilt me. I gave him up because there was something in his conduct I did not approve of. It was to satisfy myself about that I went to Mr. Wood’s lodgings ; and I fear the part he is taking against me now, is because he was angry with me then.”

“And so it was you actually who gave up this great marriage ? Mr. Carver gives it out otherwise, and I am afraid that he will more easily find believers than you.”

“I do not care *much* about that, sir ; but Mr. Wood knows to the contrary.”

“And is this all Mr. Austen knows ? ”

“It is more than he knows for certain, sir, though I believe he thinks it all. It was a painful subject for me to speak about.”

“Well, you are a very odd girl, and, I believe, an innocent one ; and remember, if I bring you through this, you must not be so eccentric for the future. Could you give me a cup of tea, for I left home so early in the morning ? ”

Honor went instantly to get one. It was a relief to have something active to do. Mr. Mauleverer walked to the window, whistling. Honor marvelled at his indifferent manner about a thing which to her was matter of more than life and death, yet she was thankful to find him so friendly. She now began to be very impatient for Frank, as it wanted but half an hour of the important time.

Mr. Mauleverer was a connoisseur of tea, and Honor’s fortunately turned out very good. The cheering cup put him in a good humour, and, as soon as it was finished, he went to prepare for the inquiry, and to see if Mr. Austen had returned.

The inquiry was to be in the school-room,

and, as everything was ready, Honor had nothing to do but to wait once more. It was to be conducted by seven persons—Mr. Mauleverer himself, three appointed by Honor Sky, and three by Mrs. Winthrop, from whom the accusation had originally proceeded. They all appeared punctually, except Mr. Austen, who was to have been one on Honor's side. James Carver, as the reader knows, was one on the part of Mrs. Winthrop. Mr. Mauleverer looked majestic, and received every one with the air of a prince.

Mrs. Winthrop approached him confidentially, and would have entered into conversation with him, but he repulsed her advances. His better genius had come to his aid, and, to tell the truth, he was somewhat ashamed of the way in which his temporary fit of ill-humour had led him to encourage her on a previous occasion. He had heard since then a high report of Mr. Austen's character, and being a man of understanding as well as parts, when his vanity and his temper did not interfere, the intercourse he had since had with him had confirmed this favourable opinion. He was anxious now to bury that day of in-

spection in oblivion, and in the opinion of the Austens and Honor to rival the Dean of Sudwich.

After having waited some time for Mr. Austen, Mr. Mauleverer, with manifest annoyance, decided that it would be impossible to wait any longer. It was evident something had occurred to prevent his attendance. Perhaps his mother-in-law was dead. They must open their proceedings at once.

Honor heard this announcement as if it had been the voice of doom; but she could say nothing against it. She felt herself, now, that he would not come. Poor girl! The absence of the only friend on whom she could really depend seemed to rob her of all her remaining courage. The paleness of death overspread her countenance, she trembled from head to foot, and a cold sweat gathered on her forehead.

“Unmistakeable signs of guilt!” said Mrs. Winthrop, with lugubrious satisfaction, to James Carver. But he did not respond or even look up. Somehow, in spite of himself, he could not meet the glance of Honor’s eyes. And now Mr. Mauleverer opened the proceedings in a short speech, pompous, but fluent

and sensible on the whole. He then turned to Mrs. Winthrop, and requested her to state formally what were the charges she had to bring against Honor Sky. She did so immediately, with pharisaical regret, but real venom.

Mr. Mauleverer answered that it was of course her business to substantiate the charges before Honor could be expected to reply to them—that it had been in Honor's power to bring an action for defamation of character against Mrs. Winthrop and others; but she had wisely, he thought, chosen the present mode of settling the affair, and it should be his care to see that the same justice was done to all parties, as if they had met in a legal court. As he spoke, Mrs. Winthrop coloured up, and said she did not suppose anybody would have doubted her word as a lady; but she looked startled when she heard that she had laid herself open to a legal prosecution.

“I do not doubt your word, as a gentleman, madam,” said Mr. Mauleverer, “but I am here as a judge—as the representative of majesty herself, and I must hold the scales of justice even-handed. Now, Honor Sky, make your statement.”

She did so, nearly in the same words she had employed about an hour before. Her manner at first was confused and nervous ; but she gathered courage as she went on, and spoke with the confidence of conscious innocence. When she mentioned that she had only seen Mr. Wood once before these two meetings, except in the company of Mr. Carver, that gentleman smiled sardonically, and Mrs. Winthrop denominated the assertion an absolute falsehood. She then produced one or two witnesses, who "felt sure they had seen Honor walking several times with a stranger gentleman," and James Carver said, unblushingly, though without looking at Honor, that he knew she had gone one night after dark to his lodgings—that her misconduct on that occasion had been the cause of his breaking off an engagement he had himself had with her—that it grieved him to publish such a thing, but truth and justice compelled him, since she would not take warning by what had passed on that occasion ; that he knew Wood—he was a good enough fellow in some things—his former life had been wildish, and he did not doubt still that he was not to

be trusted where women were concerned. He had always borne that reputation. As Honor listened, she felt that her senses must be deceiving her. She had not believed it possible that anybody—that James Carver, whom she had once loved, could have spoken with such wicked falsehood.

She was so confounded, as well as shocked, that she could only look up in helpless amazement. All present, Mr. Mauleverer included, were staggered. After all, was not James Carver's story as plausible as hers? And she did not contradict him, she did not repeat her own now. She was, however, on the point of rising to do so, when James Carver again spoke. He saw the effect of what he had already said, and he artfully increased it by pointing out how much it went to damage Honor's cause that Mr. Austen, who had up till then befriended her, had not, even at the last, sent a letter or a telegram, to explain his absence. Doubtless he had discovered his mistake. And why had she not called Mr. Wood himself as a witness?

“I did not know where to find him,” she answered, eagerly.

“You never tried,” James Carver answered.—“You must have known it was likely that I should have his address, yet you never asked for it.”

Again a deep impression was made against Honor. Mr. Mauleverer looked as if he must give her up. She saw it was all over with her, and for a moment she felt at her heart the sickness of despair. But, like the drowning man catching at a straw, she cried :

“But Mr. Austen may come yet. He promised me he would. A train comes in—oh, does it not, about this time? Wait, wait, Mr. Mauleverer—won’t you wait for the next train?”

“I don’t see what good waiting will do,” said Mrs. Winthrop. “Mr. Austen knew the hour we were to assemble, and of course, considering what a favourite you are of his, he would have come in time, if he thought he could have done you any good. But it is evident he thinks his presence can be of no service to you.”

“For my part,” said James Carver, “being a man of business, and not an idle gentleman, I fear I have no more time to

bestow on this affair, though I would willingly sacrifice a good deal, could the strange appearances worn by things at present be proved to be deceitful."

Mr. Mauleverer took out his watch.

"The train ought to be in now. Indeed I fear the time is already past. But trains, as we all know, are sometimes late. I must confess, I do not myself now expect Mr. Austen, but in order that Miss Sky may not consider herself hardly dealt with, I shall allow ten minutes longer. If Mr. Austen does not come or send by that time, we must proceed to a decision."

He looked at Honor, as he spoke, with an air of overwhelming grandeur and severity. It was evident he had begun to doubt her innocence. He then took out his watch, laid it on the table, at the upper end of which he sat, and reiterated, "ten minutes."

Ten minutes! These ten minutes seemed to Honor to fly, while to every one else they appeared tedious beyond description. At last the second hand touched the appointed place. Honor's face became more and more deathlike, and her heart seemed to stop beating.

“Ten minutes,” began Mr. Mauleverer, taking up his watch, and holding it where all the company could see it, “have now—”

As he spoke there was a loud double knock at the school-house door, as if of some one in great haste, and an instant afterwards it opened, and displayed the person of a gentleman—a complete stranger to all present except James Carver and Honor Sky. The former almost started, and for an instant looked disconcerted by the appearance of the new-comer. The latter knew not what to think; but any incident seemed to her to afford some hope. The stranger, like Mr. Mauleverer, was dripping with rain. His countenance was pale, fatigued, yet haughty withal. Mr. Mauleverer rose on his entrance, and made a bow *en grand seigneur*. He returned it with haughty *nonchalance*. He looked far more like the real *grand seigneur* than Mr. Mauleverer, and appeared to have attained the appearance without the slightest effort.

“May I request, sir,” began Mr. Mauleverer, with politeness equally dignified and elaborate, “that you will have the goodness to inform us—”

But the intruder cut him short :—

“What is my name and business here, you would ask. That is soon done. My name is William Hurst. I am the elder brother of Mrs. Austen. I have come from my mother’s death-bed. The instant she had drawn her last breath, I left it. Mr. Austen and I could not both leave my sister, and on consulting together, we agreed that my presence here was the more necessary for the ends of justice. In the first place,” he said, turning to the amazed Honor, “I come to release Miss Sky from a promise which she has so honourably and heroically kept, and which I should never have exacted, could I have guessed what it was to cost her. Miss Sky, you are at perfect liberty to tell every word that has ever passed between you and me, or, if you prefer it, I will tell myself.”

Honor looked up. She made a sign for him to go on. She could not speak, for she was weeping. Mr. Mauleverer looked all attention. James Carver and Mrs. Winthrop could not conceal their uneasiness. Mr. Hurst, as we must now call him, went on :—

“I have frequently met Miss Sky on the

road with Mr. Carver, but never, I think, looked at her, certainly never should have recognised her again, till one evening, last autumn, when she came to my lodgings. The purpose of her visit was to ascertain the truth of a report she had heard with regard to a transaction in which Mr. Carver was the principal actor, and which, she thought, involved on his part a breach of the principles of humanity, and, I believe, honesty, though, with regard to this last opinion, I believe it is only just to Mr. Carver to say that the world in general would not think with Miss Sky. Finding from the evidence I gave her that the account she had received was correct, she immediately put in execution her intention of breaking off her engagement with Mr. Carver, and, in fact, it was broken off, I believe, that very evening, or the next morning."

"It is false," cried James Carver, furiously. "I broke off the engagement after discovering the disgraceful, clandestine intercourse she had with you." Mr. Hurst, as he answered, preserved an imperturbable coolness.

"Of course I cannot tell what passed in a

private interview between Miss Sky and you. I only know that I understood from Miss Sky that she intended to break off the engagement, and the next day it was broken off. You do not, I suppose, intend, sir, to impugn my veracity."

"By no means, Mr. Hurst," said James Carver, who treated Mr. Hurst, of Derringham Hall, with much more ceremony than when he had been William Wood, for the simple reason that, in the eye of the world, he was a very different person.

"Well then," continued William Hurst; "there is Miss Sky's assertion on the one side, and yours on the other, with my testimony to throw into the scale, to enable our auditors to form an opinion about this matter. But with regard to conversation between Miss Sky and myself on subsequent occasions, you will allow I know better than you or any other person, and what I now say, I say, if you like, upon oath.

"I was so struck with the nobleness of Miss Sky's character on the night she came to my lodgings, and also with her appearance, that, not then recognising the unsuitableness

of the idea, I was seized with the romantic notion of making her my wife, and I only waited till I should have recovered from the embarrassed circumstances in which I was then placed, to put this notion into execution. When it seemed to me that the time was ripe for the execution of my project, I came to Thornbury on purpose, watched Miss Sky from her own house, one evening, walk into the woods, and met her at a distant point, and, I may say, forced my company upon her homewards. During the walk I contrived to interest her in a narrative I gave her of some passages in my own life, which do not at all concern the matter with which we are engaged, or anyone but myself. When I say interest her, I do not however mean that I interested her in the least as a lover would interest his mistress, but as a frail son of mortality might be supposed to interest some goddess," there was a slight pique and bitterness in William Hurst's tone as he spoke; "though at the time I fancied, that is, I hoped, that I might have put another construction on it. It was, however, with the greatest difficulty I prevailed on her to grant me an appointment for the succeeding evening,

and only on condition that it was to be the last time I should attempt to seek her. On this occasion, it signifies not how or in what manner I was led on to such a piece of infatuation, but I made an offer of my hand and fortune to this school-mistress, and, fully aware of my position in the world, though not, then, of my name, she, wiser than myself, rejected it. She had not forgotten what, for the time, I had—that unequal marriages must always be unhappy, and this, as I believe, some eaves-dropping lady heard me say, because her whole character has more of an angel's superiority to mundane motives than a woman's proneness to tender weaknesses.

“But, be that as it may, I am, now that I am restored to my sober senses, grateful to her for having saved me from the misery of a low marriage, and gratitude, if not justice, would have drawn me hither.

“Ere we parted, on the night on which she rejected my proposals, I exacted a promise from her that she would be silent to all on what had passed between us. My chief reason was, that, at the time, I wished to conceal my identity from my sister, Mrs.

Austen, and her husband, and I knew that if Miss Sky were to relate to them the circumstances I had communicated to her, their suspicions would be effectually awakened. I little thought then what that promise might cost her, nor how nobly she would keep it. It was only at my mother's death-bed, where I met Mr. Austen, that I learned the true state of the case. As a man I could not but feel that, even at such a moment, I was bound to set out to make manifest the innocence of a persecuted and defenceless girl."

"Persecuted?" repeated Mrs. Winthrop, with mortification—to which she strove, in vain, to give the appearance of dignified displeasure.

"Yes, madam; I said *persecuted*. I am sorry if the epithet does not please you, as I cannot find a more suitable one. And if, as a man, I was thus called upon to appear in her defence, as a gentleman I was no less bound to show that, whereas she had been accused of unduly favouring me as a lover, she had in reality refused me for her husband."

As he spoke he looked round. Murmurs of satisfaction were heard throughout the

audience, and sympathising and approving looks were turned on Honor Sky, whose countenance, in spite of its continued agitation, had regained much of its natural sweetness. Mrs. Winthrop and her ally, James Carver, alone looked discontented and uncomfortable. There was a momentary silence after the last few words spoken by Mr. Hurst. Mr. Mauleverer, who was always slow, was preparing to make a speech which should strike the audience in general, and Mr. Hurst in particular, with admiration. In the meantime, the latter gentleman took advantage of the pause, to remark sarcastically :—

“ It is not pleasant to be refused, certainly, but a man is no gentleman who could tell a falsehood about such a thing. And I have but to repeat what I have already said, that I am ready, if it will serve the ends of truth and justice, for which I trust we are all met,” he said, looking round, his dark contemptuous eye glancing for a moment, as he spoke, at Mrs. Winthrop and James Carver, “ to take an oath that all I have said, as regards Miss Sky, is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.”

Mr. Mauleverer rose with stately haste, and, waving his hand, said :—

“ Mr. Hurst, I am sure I only speak the sentiments of all present, when I say, such a proceeding is quite unnecessary. This is, you are aware, only a private enquiry, and not a legal trial. No one has been examined on oath, and, I trust, all with friendly feelings towards the—the remarkable young woman, who has been the subject of our enquiry, and whom your most generous and gentlemanly testimony must, I am sure, in the opinion of all present, fully acquit of all levity or impropriety of conduct, which is the charge brought against her. Is it not so, ladies and gentlemen ? ”

A warm and unqualified assent was instantly given to this question, in which even Mrs. Winthrop and James Carver were forced to acquiesce with the best grace they could command. Mrs. Winthrop’s attempt to look pleased was, however, a total failure. James Carver succeeded a little better. He “ was very glad to find,” he said, “ that the impropriety had been all, from his own testimony, on the side of the gentleman, and that his old playfellow was not quite so great a

flirt as experience had warranted him in believing. She had at least the happy knack of gaining powerful defenders among the opposite sex, and a plain unsophisticated man of the people, like him, and not accustomed to the refinements of gentlemen born, must be excused for putting the ordinary construction upon appearances. He had now spent more time over this affair, than he, as a man of business, who had his bread to earn, could well afford. As a man of the people, and interested in their welfare, he had naturally been anxious that the education of the people of Thornbury should be committed to the hands of one worthy of the important trust. The present company had agreed that Miss Sky was so, and his wishes and feelings were all on the side of the decision they had made in favor of his old playfellow, in whom he should ever feel all the interest their different positions warranted. Time pressed, and as the matter was now concluded, he trusted the company would excuse him."

"But one instant," said Mr. Mauleverer, rising. "Before anyone leaves this apartment, and in the face of all present, I wish to

assure Miss Sky that she is entirely and honorably acquitted of all the charges against her. Miss Sky, allow me to congratulate you ! ”

“ Thank you sir ! ” cried Honor, with tears in her eyes, and then, quite overcome, she clasped her hands, and sobbed aloud in the depth and fulness of her relief. “ Oh, thank God ! ”

Mrs. Winthrop’s and James Carver’s eyes met sneeringly, and as they left the schoolroom together, the former remarked :—

“ Upon my word, quite theatrical ! How can people submit to be taken in so ? ”

“ The world,” remarked her companion, as if consoling and fortifying himself by repeating his favorite creed, “ is full of humbug, and it requires a nice calculation of chances to regulate one’s actions. Sometimes the clearest-sighted will be deceived.”

“ Divine Providence,” said Mrs. Winthrop, bitterly, “ will not always permit that flirting minx to go unpunished.”

James Carver laughed contemptuously. He had the meanest opinion of the understanding of his present friend, and former mistress, but she was useful to him.

“I don’t pretend to know so well as you what Divine Providence will do, but we may find a way ourselves. I am rich and prosperous.”

“Instruments that could not have been placed in better hands,” said Mrs. Winthrop, with grammatical accuracy, worthy of the piety of her sentiments.

But this time her companion did not deign either to censure or laugh; and she said no more.

In the meantime, while this estimable couple were making their exit, William Hurst, undisguisedly contemptuous of them and their proceedings, was looking at Honor Sky, as for the moment she sat unconscious of everything, except that her innocence was made plain, and with her heart full of thankfulness for the deliverance which had been so unexpectedly manifested to her.

Yet it was now mere admiration and curiosity with which he had regarded her. The evanescent, though, for the time, violent, passion he had felt for her, had, like many another violent fancy of William Hurst’s, vanished for ever; but inasmuch as it had been allied with the nobler parts of his character, it

had left behind feelings different from any he had experienced in previous cases, while these feelings were qualified by two contending emotions: one of gratitude that she should have saved him from a *mésalliance*, and the other of pique that she, a poor school-mistress, should have refused him, whom her betters had so often found irresistible. But the more he saw and knew of her now, the more he was inclined to forget both these emotions, and to regard her as something apart from ordinary women, to be admired æsthetically, as we admire a picture, and towards whom no emotions but those of the mind are to be entertained.

When the door had closed on Mrs. Winthrop and James Carver, their exit, and the gaze of William Hurst, having occupied not above a minute, Mr. Mauleverer rose and approached Honor Sky.

“ Miss Sky, I beg again to offer you my warmest and most sincere congratulations on this most honourable termination to your troubles;” and the great inspector, as he spoke, actually shook hands with the school-mistress.

This example was followed by all present who remained, last of all by William Hurst.

“Oh, sir!” cried Honor to the latter, “how can I thank you? but God and your own heart will reward you, though I never can, but by my prayers.”

“I have only done you justice, I believe, Miss Sky, and vindicated myself in my own eyes from taking a mean advantage of your generous silence.”

“And at such a time, too; you came from your mother’s death-bed, and—”

She stopped.

“My reconciled family, perhaps, you would say,” he added in a lower tone, while for an instant a yet haughtier shade passed over his countenance. Perhaps he did not like to be reminded that the humble girl, whom he had just so signally served, had been his mistress on this very subject. “Even so, but I am not fond of discussing family matters at all, and especially before strangers, and I still claim your silence—your forgetfulness, if you can, of anything I may have said of any of my family.” He spoke almost defiantly.

“You may claim anything of me,” cried

Honor, with the ready warmth of her temperament, and, with native delicacy, not hazarding again any allusion to his family. "I would do far more for you than merely be silent."

William Hurst started back. "Could she have changed her mind? Could she wish to regain him as a lover?" But one glance at her open, unconscious face made him ashamed of the idea, and he answered:—

"I believe you, Miss Sky, for you are truth itself, and, believe me, it is no small pleasure to me to have earned the genuine gratitude of one human being."

What had passed between them had been heard by no one else, for though they neither stood apart nor talked in a whisper, the rest of the party had gathered round the great man, who was praising Miss Sky and himself. His kindness of heart made him really glad she was acquitted, and he saw now, too, that it would be the fashion to patronise her, while he could not help feeling that she was really a superior person.

"I saw from the first," he said, "that she was quite innocent—regular old maid's scandal. I wonder how that shrewd fellow, Carver,

could lend himself to such a piece of spiteful ill-nature. It might have succeeded though, with an injudicious person, or a man with no penetration into character ; but I saw from the first the kind of person Miss Sky was. And Mr. Hurst, too, came very opportunely."

Here he turned to that gentleman, who received him courteously. Honor Sky had never beheld William Hurst before in so favourable a light as she did now. The solemn scene he had so lately quitted had softened his usually supercilious manner, leaving it just enough *hauteur* to give it distinction. He was well and quietly dressed, and his bearing was self-respecting and dignified. Honor, too, could not but feel the generosity, and even magnaminity, of his conduct, and the contrast it presented to that of James Carver. He had come, too, he said, from his mother's death-bed. He had, therefore, been reconciled to her. He was not then the implacable person he had represented himself, but rather a being full of feeling, ill-regulated, certainly ; but whose faults were, as he himself had said, the effects of a most injudicious education.

She bade both him and Mr. Mauleverer farewell, with one or two touching expressions of gratitude, and a countenance yet more eloquent than her words. She was grieved now at having for so long cherished feelings of mistrust and ill-will towards the former, and could not believe he had ever been so much to blame as she had once thought him. Towards the latter, her feelings were yet more grateful. And he was actually the brother of Mary Austen—the brother of whose misconduct she had often heard vague hints. But the prodigal had returned, and not like the prodigal in the parable. He had returned, not to receive more gifts, but doubtless to make restitution. His poor mother had been made happy on her death-bed, and Frank and Mary, amid all their sorrow, doubtless rejoiced that the lost was found.

And then, how strange appeared her own connection with him—the way in which her destiny had been interwoven with that of the brother of her old patroness, Mary Hurst. And as Honor Sky thought of what might have been their relationship, a curious sensation of wonder came over her, and though she was alone, she coloured violently.

She thought of Derringham Hall and all its splendours, as they still appeared to her. She remembered that eventful evening in the wood, the fervour of William Hurst's tone, the fascination of his manner, which even then she had found it difficult to resist, when she thought him a very different character from what she now knew him to be. She recalled the candour of soul he had shown in her defence, the time and the manner in which he had flown to her aid, his noble and indignant tone, his flashing eyes, his manly person. At that moment he appeared to her excited imagination and feelings, endowed with the lineaments of heroism and romance.

Her little school-room was bare and empty. In her hour of triumph she paced up and down its floor alone. There was no human voice near to sympathise and elevate.

Did she then regret her decision in the wood? We will not ask too closely, reader. All I can say is, if she ever did, the regret must have been transitory, as never, by any subsequent word or action, did she show it.

CHAPTER XIII.

AT the end of about a fortnight, Mr. and Mrs. Austen returned to Thornbury, accompanied by Mary's two orphan sisters, who were, however, not to remain long with her, but were to go to Derringham to live with their brother, as soon as he should have prepared the house for their reception. It was an affecting meeting between Honor and her kind friends. Nothing could exceed the tenderness and the respect with which she was treated by the Austens, while the two girls seemed anxious to demonstrate the regard in which they held her.

All this was soothing to poor Honor's wounded feelings, although, amidst it all, she could not help being sensible of a slight feel-

ing of awkwardness and restraint between Mary and herself. Both of them, doubtless, thought of William Hurst, and of the manner in which he had been bound up with Honor's trials; yet neither of them spoke of him. Honor wondered whether Mary was embarrassed at what had passed between her brother and herself. She longed to know, but could not ask, and Mary's unconquerable shyness made her for some time equally silent.

But urged by her husband to break the ice, she began nervously one day, when he had left her alone with Honor for the purpose:—

“I have never congratulated you yet, dear Honor, on the—on the result of that—that—day, but I—I am so glad.”

“Oh, thank you! How can I ever thank you and yours enough for all you have done for me, then and always!”

Mary looked up, coloured, blushed, and hesitated. Honor, too, coloured violently. It was a moment of extreme mutual embarrassment.

“I think, Honor,” at last began Mary—“I think perhaps you—for your own happiness, I mean—Frank thinks so—but nothing—there

is nobody I should have liked so well for a sister."

Honor looked in Mary's face, and read sincerity and affection there; and, the next minute, they were sobbing in each other's arms.

"I acted for the best," said Honor.

"And it was for the best, I believe," Mary rejoined—"for the best for *you*, that is to say. William, as you must know now, is a noble creature in many respects; but, as Frank says, he is very proud, and very impulsive. We wish, indeed, he had one like you to guide him, but we doubt if it would have been an easy task. We think, perhaps, you are happier and more useful where you are. In short, God knows best."

"He does," said Honor; "and I feel now I am doing my real work. I am glad you have been so kind as to say all this to me, as I did not know what you thought. I sometimes thought you might not have been pleased that your brother had fancied me, and sometimes I thought you might have considered it presumptuous in me to have refused him."

Honor's mind was much relieved by this conversation, and things once more flowed into their usual channel at Thornbury. With all the juster-thinking part of the community, both Honor and the vicar had gained far more than the ground they had lost. Some of the people began to be proud of their school-mistress, and, with hardly an exception, the children returned to their allegiance. The funds of the school even began to improve. Frank had been afraid that it would be impossible, by any means or sacrifice, to scrape together sufficient funds to meet the conditions of the government aid, as these necessarily fluctuated with every change in that most unstable of all things, the public opinion of a small borough—or rather, I should have said, the public feelings, for there was never enough reason in the proceedings of the Thornbury people to make it justifiable to trace their actions to anything so dignified as opinion. I say this, of course, of the mere public. Individuals there were there, as everywhere, both sensible and just, but the mass were mostly swayed entirely by their own interest and passions, nor did they, in general,

recognise any virtue higher than expediency.

Mr. Austen and Honor Sky were, however, for the present, in the ascendant, and the marks of respect and consideration they met with enabled them the better to bear the gossip and the scandal which sometimes reached their ears.

A strong party, among whom were Mrs. Winthrop and Mr. Grimsby, would not believe in Honor's innocence, insisted that Mr. Hurst's evidence had only gone still further to criminate her, and that it was a family compact between him, the Austens, and Honor, to injure Mr. Carver.

The latter did all he could, by significant looks and still more significant silence, to confirm the impression; but it was his cue to say nothing openly, at least till the auspicious time should come when he might strike a blow with effect.

Meanwhile, his magnanimity and forbearance were the constant theme of Mrs. Winthrop, and Mr. Grimsby now loudly joined in the complaint of the disappointed candidate for municipal honours, that Frank did not

preach the Gospel, although the church was full to overflowing, and another party grumbled that he made evangelical doctrines too exclusively his theme.

But Frank strove to fortify himself against such evil-speaking in the consciousness that to his Master alone he must stand or fall, and that, while in submission he performed that Master's work, He would uphold him through evil report and through good report. The wickedness and the meanness of the minds which could descend to such revenge, as a man, he could only despise, though, as a Christian minister, it could not but vex his soul to contemplate them among those whom he would fain have gathered among his flock.

James Carver, in the meantime, went on growing rich and ingratiating himself with the electors and the people of the discriminating borough of Thornbury, whose three hundred constituents formed so important a part of the British public that they sent two members to Parliament. James Carver appeared to be a prosperous man in all he attempted. He established a paper-mill, he kept a soup-kitchen, he gave away coals and blankets, and

a year after the period at which we last saw him, in Honor's school-room, he attained the great object of his ambition, and was returned M.P. for Thornbury, by a large majority. Not that I mean to say that the coals, and blankets, and soup-kitchen, nor even the paper-mill, were the causes of his success, for many have done these things, and have failed. Mr. James Carver had, besides all these substantial marks of consideration, a way known only to those who practise it, of getting round a constituency like that of Thornbury, who worshipped him like a god, and who would have continued to worship him even had it been made patent to the world that he was a liar and a swindler.

The Thornbury people were not very quick-sighted to any moral offence which did not touch their own passions or their own pockets. I will not, however, stop now to moralise or philosophise upon the curious anomaly to which I have just alluded—to enquire whether it is the result of popular ignorance, or political position, or the want of moral and religious education. I will leave the question as a problem to be solved by all those who take a

real interest in the progress of God's truth, and in the welfare of their country. If I have written anything to induce the wise and good, pious men and philanthropists as well as politicians, to consider the causes of this moral blindness, which, in my belief, is not uncommon, I shall have succeeded in my aim.

But I must now take up the thread of my narrative.

Not only was James Carver now an M.P.; not only had he got a fine house and a fine carriage, but he had married a fine wife. Social life does not afford us a nobler spectacle than that of a strong, ingenious, upright man, born in a humble sphere, rising, by dint of his own talent, industry, perseverance, and honesty, to station and eminence. It is a sight which must claim the warmest sympathy and highest admiration of every heart not deadened to the higher feelings of humanity. Thank Heaven, it is a sight not uncommon in England, and our Stephensons and our Livingstones form no small part of the glory of our land.

But there is another class of persons who occasionally also attain wealth and station.

These can hardly be said to *rise*. They worm and wriggle their way to the surface of society, and gain an ignoble end by ignoble means. Their aim is not to advance science, philanthropy, knowledge, or religion. All they wish is to advance themselves. What has been, with the other and nobler class of whom I have spoken, the mere personal consequence and justly-earned reward of their earnestness in some good cause, is with these latter the only cause in which they really take the slightest interest. Often, indeed generally, they simulate an interest in some violent party movement, knowing that thus they can best play on the bad passions of mankind, and enlist them in their service. In the better side of human nature they have no faith, and this want of faith is the hidden rock on which their schemes of self-aggrandisement are most likely to be wrecked. Coarse, and grovelling, and unscrupulous, the only virtues possessed generally by such minds are determination and perseverance, and, for the good of society, it would have been better had they possessed none. Education, in their hands, becomes a mere engine of evil, consisting only of that

keeness of intellect, which, unless inspired by motives drawn from sources which are lofty and eternal, may appear to conduct a man Onwards by a path which, for a time, may seem to lead to success—but a path, every step of which is fraught with injury, not only to the individual who treads it, but to Society, and the end of which is Moral Destruction and Spiritual Death—the devastating circle widening its embrace in exact proportion to the talents and cultivation of the individual centre. The path of such a man, however fair and promising its outward show, is in reality, both for himself and the community, a retrograde one. That alone is an Onward career, which extends in good results beyond the individual life of him who gave the impetus.

The position James Carver had so long coveted was his at last. Yet, somehow, he was not so entirely satisfied with it as he had expected, nor did society court him to the extent he had anticipated. And yet there were many men, risen from lower beginnings than himself, whom even nobles delighted to honour, though they were not M.P.'s, and had not as handsome houses and carriages as him.

self. In London, indeed, he had formed around him a wealthy circle, yet it was only wealthy; but in the country round Thornbury, the gentry looked coldly on him, and very few visited him at all. What could it be?

As it was not in the nature of his mind to guess the real reason, he decided it must be aristocratic prejudice, created by the knowledge of his antecedents in the place where he had first come, a vagrant child, and been so long supported by charity. This chafed him much; but he dared not remove from Thornbury, where his political interest lay, and so he lived on, not very happy amid all his magnificence.

Mrs. Carver was a London lady, the daughter of a banker. She was very young indeed, rather pretty—elaborately, and almost vulgarly, fashionable, abundantly silly, or at least utterly common-place, with few ideas beyond her dress and furniture, and considerably elated at having made so wealthy a marriage so early in life. Love, poor thing! she had never thought of. James Carver was handsome, and young, and rich, so of course she loved him. He appeared to her an

excellent husband, because he gave her plenty of pocket-money, and was not, in a usual way, harsh or bad-tempered. Companionship in each other neither of them found, but they had not, on either side, wished or anticipated it. James Carver had had enough of imparting his projects of aggrandisement to women. His pattern woman now was exactly the sort of nonentity he had chosen for his wife, one who would be an ornament to his house, be generally submissive, and not trouble him with having any opinions whatever.

And so time sped on, Frank Austen and Honor Sky bravely breasting the flood of life, Mary meekly borne up by her husband's strong arm, James Carver becoming apparently richer and richer, and his wife wearing finer and finer clothes. They had two children—half smothered beneath laces and feathers, and Frank and Mary had three—as beseemed the humbler fortunes of their parents, clad in printed cottons and straw hats, and yet looking, James could not help confessing to himself, quite as like gentlemen's children as his own.

James Carver had now been for three years a

member of the legislature, with a financial crisis threatened a dissolution of Parliament. Thornbury, as became a place of great importance in the Commonwealth, grew to great excitement. There was every probability of a contested election. A pink candidate, who was supposed to have the country ordered to oppose James Carver and another gentleman of the same politics, became of a very different character. But general politics used to mean a particularism, but usually limited to with Thornbury elections. Local interests and local passions disturbed all other considerations. Even with the well-tempered and rightly-thinking part of the community, the "peace of the town" was as much an object as the happiness and honour of the nation. Mr. Grimsby was among the warmest supporters of James Carver; true, that gentleman opposed the politics he had usually supported, but Mr. Grimsby gave the question the go-by. He had abundant reasons for supporting Mr. Carver, quite as good as any he had had for his former warm partisanship.

As for poor Frank Austen, he was somewhat in the condition of one who,

two stools, is said to be sure to come to the ground. Finding that the principles advocated by neither party were such as he could cordially support, and believing that it was better far, situated as he was, that he should stand neutral, he withdrew entirely from the contest. The consequence was, he gave affront to both parties. But he minded not. Confident in the rectitude of his own motives, and in the faith in an all-good Providence, he went on his way, believing that the time would come, even in Thornbury, when he should have lived down all the evil speaking.

It was on the very hottest day of the canvass that he expressed this opinion to Mary, who had come in much depressed and worried by what some considerate friends had told her had been said of her husband. She listened to him, cheered, and grew stronger in his strength.

“How I wish we were going to leave Thornbury!” she exclaimed at last.

“So do I,” said her husband, “for I can fancy many places where we should be, not only happier, but in a situation better adapted to our characters.”

“Yes,” cried Mary, “some country parish, with Honor Sky with us. I should like it all the better if there was plenty of work, and I should not mind how ignorant the children were at first. But the perpetual worry, and jealousy, and slander of this place seems so complete a barrier to all good.”

“To much good certainly, dearest; but not to all, for even here, I have reason to believe, there has been a gathering out; and of course, as long as we are here, it is best,” he added firmly.

“I suppose so,” she acquiesced gently; “but oh, Frank, it is very difficult for a poor weak creature like me always to be able to feel so. Sometimes I feel, Frank, as if I were a very unfortunate person, and as if no one could be very fortunate who was connected with me. But when I say this, dearest, I do not mean to complain. I have no doubt it is because I require the discipline. But I am sorry for you—”

Frank almost laughed.

“So then my trials are all on your account. Well! the next piece of good fortune that befalls, according to that way of reason-

ing, we shall set down to your account too."

Mary smiled as she left the room, intent on household and nursery cares. Frank remained behind. He was more annoyed than he chose his wife to see ; but not at all shaken.

But, as frequently happens, when we least expect it, the clouds were about to roll away, and the sun to shine on Frank and Mary.

That very evening, as they sat at their early tea, the afternoon's post brought a letter for Frank, the address of which he saw at once was in the handwriting of the Dean of Sudwich.

"I wonder what our good friend the Dean can be writing about now," said he.

Mary's face brightened.

"I am sure I cannot guess," she replied ; "but it is generally about something pleasant. His letters always put one in good spirits."

While his wife had been speaking, Frank had opened the letter. As he read, his countenance changed. Mary was watching him.

"What is the matter ?" she cried, eagerly.

"Nothing, my darling, nothing. But it

seems so strange. Do you remember our conversation this morning ? ”

“ About all that horrid gossip ? ”

“ No, dearest ; about leaving Thornbury, and going to a country parish.”

“ Yes, dearest, but what can Dean St. John’s letter have to do with that ? ”

“ A great deal, dear, as it is, in fact, an answer to our wishes. See, it contains an offer of the Living of Dredham, now vacant, and belonging to the Dean and Chapter of Sudwich, who have, I believe, the patronage of a great many livings.”

“ Dredham ! ” cried Mary. “ Why, that is Honor Sky’s birth-place ; the very place she has wished to go to all her life ! And—”

“ Dredham ! ” echoed Frank ; “ I thought I remembered the name. Ah ! I remember the place well, and the first time I saw Honor there—the neglected church-yard—the desolate Rectory—the dame-school. How wonderfully things come round ! Well, if we go there, we shall have plenty to do.”

“ But you will go, dearest, won’t you ? ”

“ I think so,” said Frank. “ The offer has come unsolicited. Providence seems to throw

the opportunity in my way. There is a clear field of usefulness there, and I do not affect to be unmoved by the idea that my income will be doubled. Here, to make any provision for our children, and, at the same time, attend to other claims, has been impossible. At Dredham, if all goes well, it would be easy."

"Oh, we shall be so happy!" cried poor Mary, "and Honor Sky will not know how to believe it for joy. I should like to run and tell her before dark. May I?"

"Certainly, my love, if you wish. Honor is always to be trusted, and this, for the present, is of course a secret."

Mary Austen had seldom been happier in her life than she was now, as she sped on her way to the school-house. All the worries and anxieties of the morning seemed to have been dispersed as if by magic. She wondered how she had minded them so much. Nay, even Thornbury itself did not seem so very disagreeable a place. She recollected the kindness and support they had met with from many. She recalled the state of the parish and school at the time of their arrival, and

she acknowledged that though, from day to day, and week to week, it was difficult to perceive any progress, yet that her husband and Honor had done a good work since they came. Poor Mary never imagined for a second that she could have had any hand in it.

She found the school-mistress at work in her little parlour. Honor Sky was as cheerful, but perhaps not quite so joyous, as when she first came to Thornbury. She was struck at once by the expression of unusual content and satisfaction on Mary's face, and guessed she had come to impart some good news.

"We are going to leave Thornbury, Honor," said Mary, at once.

Honor's countenance fell in spite of herself.

"Leave Thornbury! I am—but what shall I do when you are gone?"

"Go with us, of course. Guess where we are going."

"I cannot, indeed."

"It is a place you know—where you have lived before."

Honor pondered. She thought of Derrington—she thought of the town in which the

training college where she had been educated was situated, and guessed the latter.

“No,” said Mary, “guess again.”

“It cannot be,” cried Honor, “no, it cannot be—” and she hesitated over the name, while her eyes shone eager and bright. Never, since the days of her girlhood, had Mary’s countenance looked so light and happy.

“Guess,” she repeated, “guess; I don’t think you are wrong.”

But Honor hardly dared to utter the name which swelled her heart and almost started from her lips.

“It seems so wild a fancy,” she said. “I know it can never be Dredham!”

“Why not, Honor—why not? Are you not pleased? No James Carvers, or Mrs. Winthrops, or elections to plague and thwart us!”

But Honor Sky’s face had become very pale. Was the day-dream of her life really about to come true?

“You are glad, Honor, are you not? I thought you would be so glad.”

“I am glad—it seems too, too much,” and tears came to the relief of her swelling heart. Mary put her arms round her, and kissed her.

“Ah, dear Honor, you have suffered so much here.”

“I have suffered; but that has done me good. Oh, I shall be so glad to go to Dredham with the experience I have gained here. I think I shall be able to gain their affections and do them good, but I shall be sorry to leave my pupils here, too. Poor things! Who will teach them next? Dredham!” and Honor seemed lost in the idea.

And all the evening, when Mary was gone, and Honor was left to her solitude, the same idea filled her heart and mind, and her brain was thronged with images of the past as well as of the future. The dame-school, kind Dame Wagstaff, gone long ago to her last earthly home, the old manor house, and its miseries, interspersed with times of childish happiness, the associates of those old days, foremost among whom, of course, was little Jim, her friend and companion then—now a great, rich gentleman, a member of Parliament, and, she could not help feeling, her secret foe and her unrelenting persecutor. Truly, time brings changes, as not only every moraliser, but every son of Adam has remarked since the

beginning of time ; and yet, trite and commonplace as the remark is, and often perhaps as we make it lightly and heedlessly, there are periods in the life of most of us when it comes home to our feelings with all the impressiveness of original truth. And when Honor looked back on the changes of the past, it led her to wonder what changes the future might have in store. Some, doubtless, it must have. The change from youth to age certainly for all, and for herself and the Austens, she hoped, the change from turmoil and worry to peace and industrious rest. But she could not believe that the future of her history should bring any such strange revolution among her own immediate associates as the past had done. With such thoughts Honor Sky had beguiled the time till a later hour than usual, when suddenly rousing herself, just at the point in her meditations I have last indicated, she began to strike a light, that she might go to bed. She was in the act of lighting her candle, when she was somewhat startled by a knock at the door.

It was past ten o'clock, and Honor in vain tried to imagine what anyone could want with

her at so late an hour, and, candle in hand, went with some trepidation to the door.

It was in the month of April, the weather being, for the season, cold and stormy. The wind had risen some half-hour ago, and blew gusty and chill among the branches of the trees, and round the corners of the school-house. There was a slender, crescent moon wading among the clouds, and fast sinking behind the church-tower. Quiet and peaceful as the little cottage was, the distant roar of the election hubbub came on the ear like the sound of the surges in sea-caves on a distant coast. Honor felt that it was neither time nor hour to admit unknown visitors, so, ere she unbarred the door, she asked who was there.

“Open the door!” said a low, almost tremulous voice, which made Honor start so violently that the candle nearly fell from her hand. But she quickly recovered, somewhat ashamed of her own nervousness, and saying to herself decidedly, “It is quite impossible.” Then she answered the intruder.

“I can open to no one at such an hour as this, unless I know his name and his business.”

There was a moment's pause.

"Honor Sky! open for God's sake! My business I cannot tell you here."

The tone was one of fear and entreaty. As it reached her ear, Honor's heart seemed to stand still. The life-blood left her cheek and lips, and she trembled like a leaf. Surely she could not have been so mistaken twice. What new and dread calamity was now impending?

"Speak," cried the voice again, "speak if you would not drive me mad."

"What can *you* want with *me* at such an hour as this? I cannot let you in. If you really wish to see me, come back in the morning."

"The morning will not do. I tell you, there is not a moment to lose, or it will be too late. Honor Sky! I know I have not deserved well at your hands, but you are better than other people—only hear me! Remember our childhood—our long association, and do not forsake me in this terrible strait. If I have injured you, you are amply revenged now."

"But I cannot let you in at this time of

night. I must think of my good name, and my influence with my pupils."

"It is business of more than life and death, I tell you," he cried with passion. "Honor Sky! on my knees, in the dust, I implore you for mercy's sake!"

He seemed to have cast himself on the door-step. His tone was a tone of agony. Honor could refuse no longer. She undid the bolt, she opened the door. As she did so, a gust of wind blew out the candle she held in her hand, and by the feeble light of the sinking moon, she beheld, crouching on the threshold, the very person of whom she had last been thinking.

Could she have been mistaken? Had a more sudden and yet stronger revolution taken place in his destiny than any she had yet seen? Her self-possession was now restored.

"Come in," she said, "and tell me quickly what you want. Surely you are not putting a trick on me."

"I swear—" he began; but she interrupted him, and led the way into the school-room, where she began to light the candle.

Then she saw that his face was wild and

haggard. Years seemed to have been added to his life—years of anguish.

And at that moment, Honor Sky forgot all his treachery, all his cruelty to her, and remembering only the old days when they had come to Thornbury together, with only each other in the wide world, she cried :—

“ What is the matter ? Tell me how I can serve you ? ”

“ God, if there be a God, bless and reward you ! You are indeed an angel,” he cried, surprised for a moment out of himself, then, ere she could speak, continuing :—“ But there is not an instant to lose. Even now the officers of justice may be on my track.”

“ The officers of justice ! ” cried Honor, scared almost out of her senses. “ Oh, James ! and has it come to this ? How can I help you here ? ”

“ You can, if you will, and you are the only person. But I am not a criminal, Honor—I assure you—I swear to you by—”

“ Hush, do not swear. Thank heaven, if you are not, but if so, why should you fear ? ”

“ Because appearances are against me, and I am pursued by an enemy who knows no

mercy, at least, unless—unless you can obtain it for me. It will be far better for himself."

"What can you mean, and to whom do you refer? You speak in riddles."

"I will explain at once, for time presses. You know William Hurst. You know he regained his family property through our means —through me and my partners, I mean. Some time ago he dissolved partnership with us, and sold out of our concern. But the title-deeds of his estate were still lodged in our keeping, though, we understood, he intended to remove them next year. Well! Oh, Honor, don't look at me with such an awful face—what I tell you is true, I swear by every oath that ever was invented! A most promising speculation offered itself, and one which had at least a million to one chances in favour of its success. We could not quite muster the necessary funds or securities; but as success was certain—that is—next to certain, there appeared to be no harm in just taking a loan of the title-deeds of the Deringham estate."

"And did Mr. Hurst give you leave?"

Even James Carver coloured, and for an

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instant looked abashed, then answered somewhat hastily :—

“ You misunderstand altogether, Honor. We—that is, I—for I had the management of the affair—never asked him. I knew it would have been of no good, for I have long been aware he would sacrifice a good deal to oblige me. I knew also that we were sure of being able to repay him. So I handed over the deeds as securities.”

“ Oh, James ! ” cried Honor, but more distressed than surprised.

“ Well ! as ill-luck would have it, Hurst took it into his head a few weeks ago that he would drain his property, and also that he would make over a sum of money to his unmarried sisters ; and to raise the necessary funds, he wanted these very deeds himself. Of course there has been the devil to pay. We are all answerable, but I have been made the scape-goat. I have every reason to believe that there is a warrant out against me—this unfortunate dissolution has been most ill-timed for me ; and though I have every reason to believe the other directors are making every effort to save me—for, if I fall, disclosures will be

made which must ruin the whole concern, and bring all to beggary who have anything to do with it—I am afraid they will fail, as Hurst is the very devil, unless you will help me."

"I?" cried Honor; "God knows, I would if I could, but it is far beyond my power. I know of no way whatever by which I can serve you."

"There is a way. You know William Hurst. He admires, and has loved you. His sister is your great friend. Persuade him to give up this prosecution, and I swear the deeds shall be restored in a month. Promise him what you like, and I will make good your promise. Honor, I swear I will! Will you not help me?"

Great drops of sweat stood on his pale face, and his eyes shone wild with entreaty.

Honor was, in truth, much moved. Despite all the glosses he had employed, she saw that he had been guilty of a dishonest act, and the disclosures which he hinted would ensue on the public discovery of his guilt, still further alarmed her. She doubted whether she had any power to help him; if she had, she did not feel certain how far it would be right to

exercise it, and the idea of applying to William Hurst was repugnant to her feelings in the highest degree. She hesitated ere she made any answer. James Carver continued, with increased urgency :—

“ Help me at this pinch, and you shall be a rich woman for life. You shall have five thousand pounds. I will do anything for the school you choose to ask. You do not know what I could do for you in Thornbury, and may curses light on my head if I deceive you ! ”

But again had James Carver overshot the mark. Again had his mean and grovelling estimate of humanity betrayed him. Honor's tone, as she answered, mingled sternness with anguish and compassion.

“ I will never sell my good-will, nor would I, on any terms, now accept your money or your aid. How to act I cannot decide in an instant. The matter is one of such importance.”

“ Of all importance,” he cried, wildly striding about; “ Honor—Honor, will you really forsake me in this awful strait. I deserve it, perhaps, but I did not think you

were so revengeful. You might save me by a word of your mouth, and you will not use it—But what noise is that?" he cried, breaking off suddenly with a scared look.

"What? where?" cried Honor, listening, and catching, distinct from the moan of the wind and the distant roar of the election crowd, the sound of voices and footsteps, which seemed to be at her own gate. "Who can it be at this time of night?"

James Carver did not answer, but it required but a second glance at his desperate countenance to guess what it was he dreaded.

"It cannot—" cried Honor, but her sentence was interrupted by a loud knock at the door. She was forced to answer the summons, and her very life-blood seemed frozen when she beheld two ominous-looking men. Their errand was not long a secret, and Honor was yet hesitating to admit them into the apartment where she had left James Carver, when he presented himself in the passage, and surrendered at once.

His countenance, to Honor's amazement, was composed and almost dogged. He spoke to the men with sullen indifference, but on

her, as he left the house, he turned a look, which she never forgot to her dying day, so full it was of anguish and despair.

Yes, this was the end of all his ambition and all his success. Sinful, criminal, as he was, Honor's heart bled for her old companion. She pressed up to him as he crossed the threshold. The men fell back for an instant, but she spoke aloud :—

“ Whatever I can do for you, I will.”

One ray of hope appeared for an instant to lighten the gloom of sullen despondency which had settled on his features.

“ Thank you,” he said ; “ you are far better than I deserve.”

CHAPTER XIV.

THE morning had not long dawned when Honor Sky reached the Vicarage, having spent a night of utter sleeplessness. Only the servants were up when she arrived, but, at her earnest request, the housemaid called her mistress. Mary, in great alarm, came down in her dressing-gown—alarm which was increased by the first glimpse of Honor's countenance. The latter, almost breathlessly, communicated to her the astounding events of the previous evening, and the petition James Carver had made to herself.

Mary listened, at once horrified and puzzled; but somewhat relieved to find that no personal misfortune had happened to Honor. She could only utter expressions of

consternation and sympathy. All she could say in the way of advice was :—

“ We must consult Frank. He is dressing. He will be here in a minute.”

Frank, even, was somewhat puzzled when he had heard Honor’s rapid narrative.

“ If you had not given him a promise, Honor, I should say at once, leave him to his fate, which, in every sense, he richly deserves. That such men should be made examples of is only due to the well-being of society.”

“ But he is punished now ; and if I could save him from the shame of an open court and a penal sentence ! His life has, I fear, been selfish, covetous, and wicked ; but I cannot forget all the past. I was thinking of our childhood at the very moment he came to me, and, no doubt, God put the thought in my heart. And oh ! if you had seen his look when he went away ! Believe me, he was punished then ; and who knows, if I help him now, but it may be affording him the means of repentance and pardon ! ”

“ Christian woman ! ” said Frank Austen, “ you would forgive your enemy, and return

good for evil ! Far be it from me, an unworthy minister of the Gospel of forgiveness, to thwart you in your pious purpose. Tell me how I can aid you. Will you write yourself to William Hurst ? ”

“ No—that is, I think it would be much better to go to him, if you or Mrs. Austen would go with me. Do I ask too much ? ”

“ You cannot ask too much from us, Honor ; but my wife’s brother is not animated by such motives as yours. There is much that is just and good in his character, but it is not the character of one who has put off the old man, and put on the new. His code of honour is that of a gentleman and a man of the world merely. The arguments and motives you have just expressed will have no weight with him. You must rest your hopes solely on his respect and regard for yourself ; and I am afraid he may think that he has already wiped out any debt he may have incurred towards you.”

“ And so he has. But I will beg this as a favour from his compassion ; and you will help me, will you not ? If I could only see him, I should not despair.”

“ You shall see him then ; and we will both go with you this very day.”

Honor could not find words to express her thanks, while Mary eagerly declared her readiness to accompany Honor and her husband to Derringham that very day. Her gentle mind was already occupied with thoughts of how her household and her children should be managed in her absence, and the packing and arrangements it would be necessary to make in so short a time.

“ Men never consider these things,” was poor Mary’s reflection, and on second thoughts, “ To be sure, Honor could not wait. It is selfish of me to think of my own convenience.”

And away she ran to finish dressing, and to commence her preparations at once, as Frank proposed they should start in three hours. Honor, too, went home. Pre-occupied as her mind was, she could not avoid noticing that, early as was the hour, knots of people, with blank faces, were assembled in the streets. As she passed, she heard a man say—an idle, dirty-looking reprobate he seemed :—

“ Dunnot believe a word on’t—it be all a

trick of his enemies. They say as how the vicar's wife's brother be at the bottom on't. It be like the pack of them! And there be school-mistress herself, I declare!" he cried, turning round and seeing Honor.

A woman now flew at the frightened girl in a fury, and shook her fist in her face.

"And it be such as you," she cried, "would turn out the friend of the poor, and put a fine gentleman in his place as will tread us down under his foot! You be for the rich folks, set you up, you ungrateful minx, after all Mr. Carver have done for you. Hurrah! Carver for ever, and down with his enemies, and the enemies of the poor man!"

Honor, of course, did not attempt to answer, but tried to make the best of her way home-wards. She was, however, pursued by the woman and one or two others, hooting after her and calling her names, and loudly reproaching her and her friends with being the enemies of the poor man's friend. She was truly glad to find herself within the shelter of her own little home. Her pupils were now beginning to assemble, but, announcing a holiday to them, they all dispersed again joyfully.

It was on the afternoon of the same day that they reached Derringham. Our three travellers, as they approached that place, so full of associations for all of them, sat silent and meditative — Frank's courting days, Honor's school life, Mary's old home—as all, it was remembered. The fly drove up to the ivied porch, the sun shone on the lawn, the fishing-boats lay high and dry in the ebb of the tide, the sea foamed on the beach as of old —it was the same place, yet different. Mary's tears flowed fast, though quietly. The stopping of the carriage recalled Frank and Honor to the full recollection of the business which had brought them ; and the former began to feel very nervous, though her resolution did not waver.

“Mr. and the Miss Hursts were at dinner,” the strange servant said ; “but if they would walk into the drawing-room, he would let his master know.”

Honor, as she followed Frank and Mary, felt very strange as she reflected that she might have entered that house as mistress ; but now that seemed all a dream. To Mary, too, it seemed a dream to be returning to

that once familiar home as a stranger. William Hurst did not detain them. As soon as he heard that Mr. and Mrs. Austen were in the drawing-room, he hastened in surprise from the dinner-table. As he kissed Mary, who rose and advanced to meet him, and shook hands cordially with her husband, his quick eye catching sight of Honor Sky, he bowed civilly, but rather haughtily.

“I am glad to see you at last, my dear sister,” he cried, “and you too, Austen—the more unexpected, the greater the pleasure. Miss Sky, you are welcome; but what can have brought you all in this sudden way?”

He had not then divined the motive of their visit, thought Honor. How were they to break the ice?

But, to her great relief, Frank did that for her at once.

As he spoke, she eagerly watched the countenance of William Hurst. It grew dark and stern—almost malignant. He turned to Honor—

“And have you, too, Miss Sky, come here on this wild-goose chase?”

She answered firmly and modestly that she

had come to entreat his forbearance in favour of a guilty person, who she trusted was already sufficiently punished, and till she heard it from his own lips, she could not believe that he would not listen to her petition.

“ You may believe it then, Miss Sky. That man is my enemy, not an open, honest enemy, but a cowardly, sneaking, secret foe, who, under different circumstances, and in a different country, would not have hesitated to stab me in the dark, and yet you ask me to forego my just vengeance, nay, to arrest the course of public justice. Even had I no personal knowledge of the man, I should have acted as I do now. What motive you can have for befriending him passes my comprehension.”

“ I have two motives—one, that he was long my friend and companion—the other, that he has lately been *my* enemy. Had he been merely the enemy of the public, with you, I should have let justice take its course.”

“ I confess I don’t quite understand you, Miss Sky. Had you been anyone else, I should have suspected you of affectation, but I can hardly suspect *you* of that. It seems

to me that the reasons you urge are valid in exactly a contrary direction."

"Not with a Christian," said Frank.

"What do you mean by a Christian? I am neither Jew, Turk, infidel, nor heretic, that I am aware of."

"I mean," said Frank, firmly, "one who is a new creature in Jesus Christ, one with whom old thoughts and feelings have passed away, and who is consequently actuated by motives in many respects opposed to those which influence even honourable and respectable persons."

"My good brother-in-law," said William Hurst, "I like and I respect you, which is more than I can say for the most of the world, and, moreover, in speaking as you do, I believe you are sincere; but such mystical explanations are quite beyond me, and I may as well tell you, once for all, that, if you and I are to remain the friends I wish, you must reserve your preaching for the pulpit."

"I answered your question, William," said Frank, kindly, but a little hurt. "I should be false, indeed, to the Master I serve, if I shrank from answering it truly."

“ Well, Frank, I honour your motives, but as for your answer, it only involves the question in a deeper mystery.”

“ Let Honor Sky answer then,” said Frank, “ not by a formal definition, but by telling you what her feelings on the subject are.”

“ The better way, much,” said William Hurst; “ if Miss Sky does not object, I must confess to feeling some curiosity.”

Honor’s thoughts were still full of the matter which had brought her; she remembered James’ face of despair, she pictured him in prison—forsaken, wretched, and hopeless, and she fancied he had suffered so much, that if he were now set free, he might turn to better thoughts, and to Him who had wrought for him so great a deliverance. As William Hurst turned to her, she said:—

“ He has used me ill and cruelly, more than once, I cannot deny; nor can I deny that at the time, and at intervals for long afterwards, I felt full of anger and bitterness against him—I hope—indeed I don’t think I would have done him any harm myself, even had it been in my power; but I often used to think that God would surely send some judgment on

him, and, I fear, I thought I should like it—I thought I should like to feel that he was beneath me, and to show him he could do me no injury, and that my way and my life had been the best and the wisest after all."

"Very natural," cried William Hurst, "and very proper, I think."

"Perhaps it *was* natural, but I am sure it was not proper; for when I had such thoughts, I was far from happy. My mind was in a turmoil, and felt bitter and wretched, and I could not attend to, or take any interest in, any of my employments. Over even the things that used to give me the greatest pleasure, a dark cloud seemed to brood. Skies seemed to cease to be blue, and fields to be green, and the songs of birds to be sweet, and the most interesting books became insipid and unendurable, and everything I did a burden. Sometimes I gave way to these feelings, and then I was miserable; and sometimes I struggled and prayed against them, and felt almost as if I overcame them, and at such times I was better and happier, and by degrees, at last, I seemed to forget them. Only last night, however, something made me think of

James Carver, more than I had done for some time, and though I was not tempted with the miserable and wicked thoughts I used once to have, I wondered if his fortunes would ever change, and though I am sure I did not wish him anything so dreadful as what has happened, I believe I thought with complacency of his experiencing some downfall or reverse—I am afraid—I am afraid, though I did not think so at the time, I rather wished it. And then, when in the very middle of my thoughts, he came to me in such anguish and despair—despair and anguish which to see even in a perfect stranger would have been terrible, and when all we had once been to each other came back to my feelings—all our childhood, all his kindness then, and his love afterwards, I felt as if it were a judgment on myself. God had punished me awfully, by sending me what I had once wished ; and I, who thought myself so much better than James, saw myself only differing from him by the grace of God. And then it seemed to me, if this terrible punishment came on him, and he was shut up with criminals, and debarred all hope, that he might never change, and I thought, if I could per-

suade you to pursue him no further, perhaps he might take warning and repent yet. And I thought, too, it might do him good to show him I was not his enemy, and that he had not done wrong when he came to me. He wanted to bribe me to help him, but that I spurned, and then I thought, if I showed him I had done it of my own free will, and because I forgave him, I hoped, too, that might do him some good. Oh ! Mr. Hurst—" and Honor looked beseechingly at the stern man on whom hung the fate of him she had so truly forgiven.

But William Hurst did not answer. His countenance, which was eagerly watched by Frank and Mary, had changed more than once during Honor's appeal ; but though he looked struck, even startled, by parts of her recital, his purpose yet remained inscrutable. All wondered why he did not speak. At last he asked abruptly, his voice sounding hoarsely as he did so :—

“ Have you nothing more to say ? ”

“ Nothing, sir, except, if I might be permitted, if you would not take it as an affront—”

“Go on,” he said, more hoarsely than before.

“I was going to say, then, Mr. Hurst, you have been very kind to me already, and I am very, very grateful, but, for your own sake, I wish you would grant my petition. I am sure you would be happier. I am sure when you come to lie where we must all lie some day—when your only hope is in mercy and pardon—for none of us at such a time can have any other, it would grieve you then, I know it would, to think you had refused it to your fellow-sinner. Oh, Mr. Hurst! look back on your own life, and think whether you have been happiest when you forgave and were forgiven, or when you gave yourself up to wrath and enmity, however just they might appear to you. Oh, believe me, vengeance belongs to One only, and if we presume to make it ours—a heavy retribution will be ours too.”

While Honor spoke, William Hurst had covered his face with his hands. As she finished, he rose suddenly from his seat and approached her.

“Miss Sky!” he said, forcibly crushing down some emotion which had threatened to

impede his utterance, and speaking more strongly and distinctly as he proceeded, “you are a singular woman. You have prevailed where I believed no human being would have prevailed. This prosecution shall be stopped, and if it be some time ere you hear of it, you must not doubt it. I will not appear against the prisoner, I give you my promise. Stay, do not thank me—if you wish to show me that I have been able to oblige you, it must be by never again alluding to the subject. And now, Miss Sky, you must ask no more favours from me. Our positions, our paths in life are different, and can never cross again. As a woman, I admire and reverence your character beyond that of any other I ever knew; but henceforth I know you only as school-mistress of my brother-in-law’s parish, and you will oblige me by forgetting that you ever knew me, except as Mr. Hurst of Derringham Hall. If you promise, I know I can trust you.”

“I can promise,” she said, “that no allusion to any other knowledge of you shall ever pass my lips; but in my heart I can never forget either this day or the last day I saw

you. Though you do not wish my gratitude, I cannot help feeling it ; but this is the last time I shall ever mention it."

"Enough ; but now you must all come to the dining-room, and get some dinner after your long journey."

As William Hurst said these last few words, all present wondered at the facility with which he assumed in a moment the easy, hospitable tone of a refined host and a kind brother. Sternness and emotion were equally gone. The high-bred, graceful, yet cordial man of the world alone remained. His invitation was addressed to Honor as well as the Austens. She declined it politely, saying she meant to walk over to Farmer Goodwin's to spend the afternoon and night with Mrs. Goodwin—once Miss Wormsley, her old governess, who, she knew, would be delighted to see her. Tomorrow she should return home. No one offered any opposition to this plan, as all felt it was the best. Only William Hurst insisted on sending her in his dog-cart. Frank wrung her hand with affectionate sympathy as she went, and Mary, while she embraced her,

whispered a request that she would see the children, and write every day till she came back, which she would do in three or four days at the farthest.

Another fortnight had passed. The Austens had returned, the election was over at Thornbury, and had left behind its usual legacy of heart-burning, bitterness, wrath, and evil-speaking. Frank Austen was of course one of the prominent objects of attack. James Carver's adherents, although defeated, remained—at least many of them remained—as devoted in their allegiance to him as ever. A party, at the head of which was Mrs. Winthrop, maintained that he was the victim of a plot concocted by the Austens, their brother, and Honor Sky, who, everybody knew, had long been leagued together to ruin him. And she went about collecting a subscription to present him with a piece of plate, and also to obtain signatures to a paper expressing admiration for his character and sympathy in his misfortunes. Both of these papers were presented to Frank, and to both he refused with indignation to affix his name. Sympathy with, and regard for, Honor Sky had induced

him to abet her in her effort to save him from the disgrace of a public trial and a criminal conviction—motives which were strengthened by the desire to exhibit to his brother-in-law, in the little school-mistress, an example of a really Christian spirit, knowing that the prosecution of the latter proceeded from personal revenge rather than from public justice.

But he felt that he owed it to himself and his parish to testify at all times openly against open guilt. He felt that to seek to restore any one to a position which by his own criminal conduct he had justly forfeited, by every law of God and man, was only to offer a premium to vice. He would at all times have been among the first to assist a penitent sinner to rise, and to lend him a helping hand to live honestly and decently; but to endeavour to reinstate an impenitent one in any place of credit or responsibility, was contrary as well to the imperative dictates of his conscience as to his sense of what was due to the public well-being.

The forgiveness which our Master came to seal with his blood did not consist in an in-

difference to guilt, but, as one of its express conditions, was associated with an abhorrence and repudiation of it, which are without limit or compromise.

Mrs. Carver's family did not, however, participate in the sentiments expressed by the Thornbury sympathisers. Her father came down from London, and took her and her children away with him, and he was heard to speak of his son-in-law in no measured terms. James's arrest had, as he himself had anticipated, led to another catastrophe—a disclosure of all the affairs of the company of which he had been one, and, as it now turned out, one of the most active directors. All England rang with the infamy of the disclosures, and, with the exception of one bigoted section of the Thornbury public, all England had but one opinion on the subject. The reckless ruin of hundreds of industrious and hard-working men, the cry of the widow and the orphan, reach not hearts cased against every feeling of compassion and just indignation by the triple proof of selfishness, obstinacy, and party spirit. They had not been sufferers. If he had taken from others, he had given to

them, and the moral delinquency involved in being generous at the expense of justice was proverbial in vain for them.

It was the belief of this party, as I have said, that all his misfortunes were owing to the vicar and the school-mistress, who had, moreover, the wickedness to believe, or at least to affect to believe, and the hardihood to maintain, that education and self-dependent industry, however frugal, are better and nobler than the receipts of charity, either public or private, and that peace and mutual kindness are infinitely superior to all the rivalry of party and the hatred of faction. These were heterodox opinions in Thornbury, to many of whose people party politics were as the very breath of their nostrils, and to whom literally, as well as figuratively, they were meat and drink.

At another time, both Frank and Honor might have been more worried than they were now by what seemed to be their unpopularity. But Frank's approaching removal furnished him with other cares which demanded peremptorily his attention, though it grieved him deeply to think that he was not to part from his present flock on more kindly terms.

Honor Sky, in the meantime, had neither heard of, nor from, James Carver, and the Austens were equally ignorant. She wondered if William Hurst had fulfilled his promise. It seemed impossible to doubt it ; yet if James were at liberty, he would surely have written. Once or twice she had thought of writing to his wife, or inquiring of Mrs. Winthrop, but reflection induced her to abandon both plans as impracticable.

And now it was known in Thornbury that the Austens and Honor Sky were going, and no sooner had the fact become noised abroad, than a wonderful revolution appeared to take place in the sentiments of the place towards them. And yet, perhaps, after all, it was not a revolution in reality, but a mere outward demonstration of feelings which had long existed and been increasing. The evil that persons think of us, and wish us, always declares itself more loudly than the good. Love and respect, except among those with whom we are intimately associated, though equally true and deep, necessarily requires an opportunity for its display.

The Austens, and even Honor, were now

daily gratified by the many marks of regard and kindness shown them, and by the regret which was publicly testified at their departure. And now, and not till now, was Frank touched and surprised by the instances in which he discovered that his words and his advice had gone home to many a heart with comfort and strengthening, and that many a spirit had been softened and healed, which he had yet believed to be in the gall of bitterness. In dust and ashes he humbled his own soul, as he remembered his frequent seasons of unbelief and hopelessness, and while his heart expanded in joy and gratitude, he gave God the glory.

Hatred and malice appeared for the present to have shrunk into hiding-places, and to be ashamed to show their faces. One or two abortive attempts at annoyance, it is true, were made in the shape of reports and hand-bills, but they were put down at once by general indignation, and their authors were glad to sneak into their holes and corners without further observation. After all, Thornbury, when it really showed itself in its true colours, and exerted itself to speak out, was

not such a bad place. Unfortunately the demon of party kept on kindling a flame under its passions for ever, and so it was no wonder that they generally came to the surface.

It was very early on a summer morning that the Austens and Honor Sky left Thornbury. The earliest dewdrops yet sparkled on the flowers in the Vicarage garden, and hung on the grass which covered the graves in the churchyard. Gaily, too, glowed the flowers in Honor's little borders, and a cock crowed cheerily on the wall as they passed, for they had started from the Vicarage, where Honor had spent the night. The church tower rose solemn and dark in the shade, and over all the landscape—over the dark summer woods, and the blue undulating plain, lay the soft shadows and the sweet light of early morning.

Mr. and Mrs. Austen, Honor, and the nurse, with the children dispersed among them, were in a fly, on their way to the railway-station. As the gate closed for the last time on the first home of her married life, where, amid all her trials, she had been so

happy, Mary burst into tears. Frank bore up manfully, but wrung his wife's hand in token of sympathy. Honor, with a swelling heart and brimming eyes, looked from the window, perusing eagerly, as they passed, each well-known object.

Just as they came within sight of the church, the chimes, soft and silvery, began to play. Honor strained her eyes to catch a last glimpse of Aunt Keziah's grave round the chancel corner, and remembered how she and Jim had heard these very chimes when they came to Thornbury together—two helpless children—long years ago, to throw themselves on the charity of that kind heart which lay there now, cold and still, till the sound of the Great Trump should wake it up again to warmth and joy for ever.

And then a sound, between a murmur and a shout, disturbed her meditations ; and, looking down on the road along which the carriage was passing, she saw that it was lined with children—her own pupils—who eagerly threw flowers into the carriage window, and strove to gain from their departing mistress a farewell nod or smile. And “Good bye, gover-

ness ! ” “ God bless you, governess ! ” “ Thank you, governess, for all your kindness ! ” rose, in trembling accents, from many a young and usually thoughtless, heart as they passed. And Honor, too, could hold out no longer ; but, while she waved her hand, and strove in vain to answer, sobbed aloud in the fullness of her heart.

“ Who,” cried Frank, as they approached the gate of the station—“ who would ever have thought we should have been so sorry to go away from Thornbury ! May God bless and prosper His work, through us, where we are going ! ”

“ Amen ! ” said Honor.

Mary could not speak.

CHAPTER XV.

HONOR SKY had been for some little time at Dredham, when she received the following letter, which was without date, either of time or place, and had no signature :—

“ When you receive this, I shall have sailed for America, thanks to your friendly efforts. That banking affair has been a bad job, but, thank my stars and you, I am free from it now. I go where there is a wider field for talent and enterprise than in this narrow, used-up country. I don’t despair of getting on yet. Better luck next time. In that calculation of chances, on the result of which the probabilities of all events are based, and which, when our knowledge of averages is

more perfectly reduced to a science even than at present, will, I believe, be all but infallible, there are enormous odds against the recurrence of a misfortune such as I have just had, and which has only been brought about, even now, by a most curious combination of circumstances. So, you see, after all my misfortunes, I can still look Onwards, and I don't despair yet of being a member of Congress and a great man among the Yankees. I flatter myself I shall get round Brother Jonathan quite as easily as round John Bull. I was monstrously cast down for a time after seeing you last, and the atmosphere of a prison is not good for the spirits. But now I am myself again. There is nothing like pluck for getting on in the world, except perhaps blarney, but that I won't waste on you. Therefore I say not much about gratitude, as you might not believe me; but if I get on, as I hope, you shall have some more substantial reward than mere words for your exertions on my account. And though you may not believe it, I really mean what I say, as I trust you will one day see, as, with all your goodness—and I really think you are the best person in the world—you

would not be such a fool as to refuse money honestly earned by yourself. Meanwhile, I am your well-wisher and

“ YOUR DEBTOR.”

After the receipt of this epistle, Honor Sky well-nigh gave up all hope of the writer. James Carver has not been heard of since the great fracas of the bank, but as that is not yet very long ago, he may, for aught I know, be getting on, for the broad road which he travels is easily found ; but, whatever he and the world may think, the traveller on it is but going round a circle which terminates in the same abject meanness in which it began.

A year after the events recorded in the last chapter, William Hurst married the daughter of a gentleman of family and fortune. He spends part of the year at Derringham, and part in London, but whether in town or in country, he is equally aristocratic and exclusive in his choice of society. He is, in substantial matters, a just and even liberal landlord ; but his manners are not conciliating, and he is certainly not popular. He is punctilious in his fulfilment of all the decencies of life,

attends morning service every Sunday, and never neglects the magistrates' meetings. He has built a very pretty new church, situated due east and west, and adorned with candlesticks, credence tables, crosses, and all the nick-nacks the law will permit. The manner in which it is executed, the mellowed light, the keeping and consistency of the whole, are in perfect taste. In perfect taste, too—in that refinement of taste which denotes the presence of the poetic faculty, are his house and grounds, his wife's dress, and everything which surrounds him. It is evident that William Hurst is the ruling spirit of all that belongs to him. From his opinions and decisions there is no appeal.

Since the day on which Honor Sky was last at Derringham, he has never taken the slightest notice of her. If he has met her by accident, when visiting the Austens, he passes her with the slight nod with which he might recognise an unknown inferior whom he had met by chance. If he ever mentions her before others, it is as his "sister's valuable little school-mistress."

It is said that it is likely that William

Hurst will get into Parliament at the next general election, on the strongly Conservative side of the question. Great expectations are entertained with regard to his talents and eloquence, which have already, at various public meetings, attracted considerable notice and admiration.

And now, perhaps, the reader who may have accompanied me thus far may wish to know if the Austens and Honor are happy in their village home. It is in my power to give them yet another glimpse of the lives we have hitherto so closely followed, and, having done so, I will leave him to judge for himself.

It was an afternoon in early autumn, about the same season of the year as on that evening when Honor set off on her first memorable expedition to the sea. It was early in the afternoon yet; and in London it would have been considered the morning. There seemed to be an unusual bustle in Dredham to-day, particularly in the direction of the Rectory and school-house. Children were running to and fro with merry, triumphant countenances, and women, with babes in their arms, were standing at the cottage-

doors, as if they expected to see some sight.

Dredham, more especially in the neighbourhood of the Church and Rectory, was so much improved that one would hardly have imagined it to be the same place. The church and chancel had been nicely and tastefully repaired; not a nettle or weed of any kind was to be seen in the churchyard, which was nicely mown and swept, and on which lay, dark and sober, the shadows of the trees. A carriage-drive, bordered on either side by flowers and graceful shrubs, led up to the Rectory, a neat and comfortable brick house, embowered in greenery, and standing on a sloping lawn of smoothest and greenest turf. Flower-beds, too, there were on this lawn, glowing amid the verdure with the gorgeous hues of autumnal flowers, while acacias and weeping ash-trees made here and there a pleasant shade for a rustic seat. A grass field, in which grazed the rector's cows, was separated from this lawn by an invisible fence, and bounded on the further side by the churchyard trees, amid whose dark boughs rose the old grey tower of the sacred edifice itself.

On the opposite side of the road from the church and Rectory, stood a new building in the Old English cottage style, built of red brick, with latticed windows, having stone mullions and facings. A low wall, surmounted by an iron railing, separated the garden in which this pretty cottage stood from the road ; and a prettier little garden, with its green turf and its gay flowers, could not be seen in England. A little beyond the cottage rose one fine elm tree, a rare thing in that part of the world—shading and guarding it. Behind the cottage there was another entrance, through what looked like a small play-ground. As the reader has doubtless already guessed, this was the new home of Honor Sky, and to celebrate the opening of the new school-house, there was to be to-day a treat for the children. They were all to go down in waggons, lent for the occasion by the neighbouring farmers, to the sea, where they were to have games on the beach, and tea in a garden close by ; and many a little heart was now beating fast at the prospect.

“ And this pretty school-house,” asks the reader, “ where did it come from ? Who built it ? ”

It was the gift of the Dean of Sudwich to the parish of Dredham, given, he said, to her native place, out of esteem for his young friend, Honor Sky, and for the benefit of the great cause of National Education. He believed, he said, that Miss Sky would prove a model school-mistress, and he wished her to have a model school-house.

And the parishioners of Dredham felt proud of their school-mistress, and, in consequence, subscribed to purchase the piece of land on which the school-house stood. The furniture, neat and simple, had been the gift of the rector, and the flowers were from his wife's own garden, and many of them planted by her own hand.

The day with which my story closes had for some time been fixed to celebrate the opening, and the Dean of Sudwich had come, to be present, and to pay a visit to the Austens. Greatly to the delight of all concerned, the weather had proved most favourable, and now the time so long anticipated by all the juvenile part of the parishioners had actually arrived. The day had been begun by a meeting in the school-house, and an address there by the

Dean to the children and their parents. The various parties had then separated to dine. Now the waggons lumbered out of the various farmyards, and collected in the space between the Rectory gate and the school-house. Troops of children, in holiday clothing, carrying gay banners and garlands of flowers, and green branches, approached, laughing and talking, from all quarters. Honor Sky herself, her countenance almost as joyous and childlike as it had been seventeen years before, when in that very same spot she had first seen Frank Austen, stood at her garden gate giving directions, and bestowing on the children words of commendation or reproof, as the occasion demanded.

Walking down the path from the Rectory came the Dean of Sudwich and Mr. and Mrs. Austen, followed by three merry children. Both the gentlemen were talking with great animation. Mary looked quietly happy—happier than we have seen her look before—contentment in her large, dark eye, and love and good-will beaming from her beautiful matronly face. And the sick and the aged, whose infirmities were not too great to prevent

them to come out to see the sight this fine day, pray God to bless her as she passes. For Mary has found her work at last. All who are in sickness, and pain, and weariness in Dredham, have recourse to her ready sympathy and gentle nursing.

As for Frank Austen and Honor Sky, they had not, of course, found Dredham a paradise ; —since Adam fell, there has been no such place on earth. Folly, and vice, and worldliness, and jealousy, and ambition are to be found even in rural villages, and ignorance is their indigenous and most obstinate growth ; but two years' experience and patience had brought some success and much hope. The same adverse and disturbing causes did not operate here as at Thornbury. Even those who blamed the rector most, as a meddling man and an innovater, allowed that he was a just one, and kind and civil to all.

The school, which had at first met with the greatest opposition, was now gaining daily in favour. Most of the children even seemed to like it themselves, and the punctuality, cleanliness, and order which had been enforced, and at first much complained of, now became a

matter of emulation among the pupils themselves. Their improved condition had even already begun to re-act upon the parents, who were now willing to save their weekly pence, and work a little harder, that their little ones might not fall behind the rest. That most important of all points—a public feeling in favour of education by the people themselves—seemed to have already commenced, and both Mr. St. John and Frank felt that, when this was once achieved, the work was well-nigh done. Till ignorance is felt to be disgraceful, and the intelligent labourer is found to be the most successful workman, education will never be prized and sought after; and schools which are maintained merely by individual generosity, and subject at any moment to the casualties attending so precarious a source of existence, will seldom, except in such rare instances as those where a singular zeal and fitness in the teachers or managers are brought to bear on the case, have time to work this favourable opinion and experience so thoroughly as to make the school self-supporting—the only guarantee for its continuance, in default of some measure which will render it as compulsory on

each parish to provide for the mental as for the bodily wants of its population.

Such an enactment would be no new and untried experiment. It has been long and successfully at work in one part of our own island, and has produced an able, thoughtful, and helpful people. Perhaps some may be inclined to say, the people have produced the system, and not the system the people. It may be so; but I can hardly believe that the great English nation will be very fain to acknowledge that they are inferior in mental faculties, or in the power of self-sacrifice in a great cause, to their far poorer neighbours of the north; who, if they are not so much poorer now as they were once, owe their improved condition, in abundant measure, to the effect of their system of parochial schools.

But this is a much longer digression than I meant.

Our village party were now on the beach at Sunnystowe, and the afternoon passed swiftly, amidst games, and sports, and laughter. Tea and buns had been amply discussed in the pleasant tea-garden of the inn. The sun was now declining in the sky, and

while preparations were being made for returning homewards, Honor strolled a little apart from the rest of the party, and turning the angle of a rock, sat down for a few minutes, to admire the scene alone, and give herself up to the thoughts which all day had been suggesting themselves to her mind, but which, till now, she had never had even one brief minute to indulge in.

As she sat, her eyes fixed on the sea, boundless and changeless, the rosy light of evening tinging once more the snowy spray, and the clouds in the east reflecting the red dyes of the western sun, themselves reflected in the waters beneath—as she gazed on the fisher-boy in the boat, and the breakers' retreat from the smooth yellow sand, as she inhaled the fresh scent of the breeze and the sea-weed, time appeared to roll back, and for a moment she seemed to herself the little Honor Sky of seventeen years ago. But then came memory, with her long train of images and scenes, to show that it was not so. And she thought of her companion of that day, of his ambitious, unscrupulous spirit, and the last letter she had had from him—two years ago

now. He was on the other side of a wider sea than that on which she now gazed—that is, if he had not already passed that ocean which can be crossed but once.

But Honor pictured him rather as still living, still engaged in the restless, thankless toil to get on. It was difficult to think of James Carver in any other world than this. He was emphatically of the earth—earthy, and though all his life had been spent in looking Onwards, he had probably not once, through its whole course, looked Upwards.

And then, as she heard in the distance the voices of the little Austens, lisping innocently in reply to the gentle tones of their mother—her thoughts turned somewhat blankly, for the moment, to the contemplation of her own Onward path. No sweet household Life, no husband's supporting love, no children's touching dependence for her. What then? Yes! What then? Only that very morning Mr. St. John had told her that his educational experiment at Dredham had, through her means, succeeded so well, in so short a period, that when she had gained experience, and her method had ripened to maturity—when Time

permitted the effects of her labours to be visible in the generation she was now leading on to adolescence, he was not without hope that a new educational era might begin, not only for the district, but, perhaps, for the country.

In the morning, all this had made Honor feel happy and elated ; now, somehow or other, the prospect seemed distant and faded—nay, impossible.

“ But what then ? ” whispered her better and braver Spirit. “ It is a glorious end to labour for, and if not yourself, a day will come —doubt not—when others shall enter into your labours.”

She sighed, but with the smile of Peace and Hope upon her lips, and clasping her hands, raised her eyes in Self-Dedication.

The rosy tints had faded. The clouds they had so lately suffused with splendour now crept grey and chill over the sea—earth-born vapours returning fast to the depths from which they came, and beautiful no longer, now that the Heavenly radiance had ceased to rest upon them.

“ And so it is,” thought Honor Sky, following out an old habit of attaching moral or spiritual meaning to natural phenomena ; “ and so it is with all human aspirations and human deeds ; however, for a time, they may seem to rise, they are but vapours tending downwards, unless they are touched with the Light of the Sun of Spirits : then they become akin to Him in beauty—earthly clouds no longer, but glorified wreaths in the field of Heaven.”

THE END.

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